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Institutionalization of Service-Learning in Higher Education

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Institutionalizing Service-Learning in
De La Salle University: "Bibingka Approach"

4.15

Texts extracted from Volume 4 of the Uniservitate Collection:
Institutionalization of Service-Learning in Higher Education

Uniservitate Collection

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Institutionalization of Service-Learning in Higher Education / Chantal Jouannet...

[et al.] ; adaptado por Luis Arocha ; coordinación general de Chantal Jouannet ;

Luis Arocha. - 1a ed. - Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires : CLAYSS, 2023.

Libro digital, PDF - (Uniservitate ; 4)

Archivo Digital: descarga y online

Traducción de: M. Alejandra Linares.

ISBN 978-987-4487-46-9

1. Educación Superior. 2. Pedagogía. 3. Doctrina Social de la Iglesia. I. Jouannet, Chantal, coord. II. Arocha, Luis, adapt. III. Linares, M. Alejandra, trad.

CDD 378.002

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Dr. Melegrito has written numerous researches and publications. One of her most recent works is entitled Meaning, Application, and Challenges of University Social Responsibility: The Case of De La Salle University published under the Asia-Pacific Journal for Student Affairs. She received a special award from Catalino D. Yap Chair in Grassroots Education in 2020.

15. INSTITUTIONALIZING SERVICE-LEARNING IN DLSU: “BIBINGKA APPROACH”

Marietta Guanzon and Lourdes Melegrito

De La Salle University, Philippines

Abstract

An important milestone that took place in De La Salle University (DLSU) is the incorporation of the social engagement principles in the academic discipline through Service-Learning (S-L). Service-Learning makes education anchored on Lasallian pedagogy and learning through students’ active participation in community development. In 2015, pivotal in the new DLSU Strategic Plan was the directive to institutionalize S-L through the integration of the S-L component in all the undergraduate and graduate academic programs. To complement these policies, fees were provided, faculty were trained, select course syllabi incorporated a service component, researches were published, and a separate S-L program was formed dedicated to assisting students and faculty members extend meaningful service to the partner communities.

Reinforcing this policy is the passion and commitment of key faculty members to enhance the moral, spiritual, and civic development of their students through the integration of service in their teaching pedagogy. Faculty members ensure that students embody the service-driven attributes who have not only learned the theories but also have conceptualized and concretized learning through their enriched experience with the community.

This paper intends to describe the mutually supportive strategy which is called the “*bibingka* approach¹⁹,” that facilitated the institutionalization of service-learning in DLSU. This approach mutually reinforces the top-down and bottom-up as well as strengthening actions on both sides as strategic approaches which paved the way to the development of a sustainable curriculum-based university-social engagement with the disadvantaged and marginalized sectors of the society.

19 The word *bibingka* is a type of Filipino rice cake that is cooked by placing live charcoal simultaneously on top of and below the dough during the baking process. This strategy proposes that reforms are likely to occur if: (1) there is sustained pressure from below, and (2) enabling actions that are taken by leadership reformers from above. (Aceron and Isaac, 2021).

1. Service-Learning in DLSU

The Lasallian educational mission is committed to making the benefits of a transformative human and Christian education available to all, most especially to the poor.

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As a concrete manifestation of this commitment, an important milestone that took place in De La Salle University (DLSU) is the incorporation of the social engagement principles in the academic discipline through Service-Learning (S-L). It makes education anchored on the Lasallian pedagogy and learning through students' active participation in community development. As a course-based and credit-bearing educational experience, it facilitates student's educational process through a transformative learning pedagogy and contributes to the fulfillment of the university's social responsibilities through engagement in community and societal change. S-L, likewise, aids in uniting the three missions of the university which include teaching, research, and social engagement.

Service-learning is a constructivist pedagogical approach where students learn through experience and reflection. Through experience, the students learn how to empathize with poor and disadvantaged sectors of society. It challenges them to further practice the Lasallian values of faith, service, and communion which are fundamental in Lasallian identity and formation. Service-Learning strengthens the students' commitment to help and promote servant leadership among students.

To attain a sustainable and quality implementation of S-L in the university, the academic and community leadership must commit to S-L institutionalization.

To attain a sustainable and quality implementation of S-L in the university, the academic and community leadership must commit to S-L institutionalization. It is essential to entrench the concept, principles, and values of S-L in the central fabrics of educational institutions to uphold its meaningful milestones and generate momentous impact. Thus, it requires recognition of S-L as a transformative learning pedagogy from institutional leadership and its integration in the policies and strategic direction of the institution. It initially starts with institutional representation through interventions such as statement or action that supports service-learning. These can be manifested through the institution's mission statement, policy framework,

and values of S-L in the central fabrics of educational institutions to uphold its meaningful milestones and generate momentous impact. Thus, it requires recognition of S-L as a transformative learning pedagogy from institutional leadership and its integration in the policies and strategic direction of the institution. It initially starts with institutional representation through interventions such as statement or action that supports service-learning. These can be manifested through the institution's mission statement, policy framework,

Institutionalization also demonstrates a commitment to uphold S-L in the form of infrastructure, staff and administrative support, faculty roles, funds, performance rewards, and incentives, and institutional strategic planning and assessment.

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leadership appointment, structural support, and budget allocations. Institutionalization also demonstrates a commitment to uphold S-L in the form of infrastructure, staff and administrative support, faculty roles, funds, performance rewards, and incen-

"Bibingka Approach": De La Salle University's Way Towards S-L Institutionalization

At De La Salle University (DLSU), institutionalization is carried out through what we refer to as "Bibingka Approach." In the Philippines, this approach is commonly used by civil society in advocating policy reforms. *Bibingka* is popularly known as a type of Filipino rice cake that is cooked by putting charcoal in the fire on top and below the dough. This was coined by then scholar-activist, Saturnino Borras, Jr. and described the approach as a mutually reinforcing reform measure from above and from below. (Isaac and Acheron, 2021) The civil society organizations believe that reforms are likely to occur if there are sustained citizens pressures from below and enabling actions by leader reformers from above. The said approach is also similar to Jonathan Fox's concept of sandwich strategy which combines pressure from above and below to counteract anti-accountability forces. (Isaac and Acheron, 2021)

With sufficient advocacy and mobilization from below (Faculty/Department Chairs/Deans) and with adequate openness and commitment from above (President, Chancellor Vice-Presidents), together with backbone support of the Center for Social Concern and Action (COSCA) and the commitment of community partners, S-L at DLSU is now insti-

The bibingka approach mutually reinforces the "fire from above" represented by DLSU leadership and the "fire from below" embodied by S-L champions from the different departments and colleges.

tutionalized. The *bibingka* approach mutually reinforces the "fire from above" represented by DLSU leadership and the "fire from below" embodied by S-L champions from the different departments and colleges. The reform measures are undertak-

The COSCA, as the social development center, "fans the fire" by initiating and facilitating discussions, meetings, and supports both the actions from above and below. The Community Partners, on the other hand, "enhances the fire" by supporting the DLSU initiative through their commitment to the community engagement process of the faculty and students.

en from leadership above and the deep-rooted actions by faculty and staff from below are strengthened by actions on the side of which include, "fanning the fire" and "supporting the fire." The COSCA, as the social development center, "fans the fire" by initiating and facilitating discussions, meetings, and supports both the actions from above

and below. The Community Partners, on the other hand, "enhances the fire" by supporting the DLSU initiative through their commitment to the community engagement process of the faculty and students.

The DLSU's way towards institutionalization is described in schematic framework illustrated in Figure 1: The "Bibingka Approach" – the DLSU Institutionalization.



FIGURE 1. The "Bibingka Approach" – the DLSU Institutionalization

The key strategies of the *bibingka* approach for establishing mutually reinforcing activities include the following:

1. **Popularize the idea and Stir Discussion:** Introduce S-L ideas in Academic Assemblies, faculty meetings and staff development, and University seminars.
2. **Identify and Engage your Champion:** Based on interactions with the faculty, staff, and administrators, COSCA identifies and mobilizes possible allies, whom we refer to as S-L champions.
3. **Involvement and Formation of Champions:** The champions on their own volition, 1) initiates popularization of S-L ideas; 2) meets regularly and attends S-L seminars, conference and other S-L activities organized by COSCA.
4. **Solicit Leadership's Active Role:** Engage institutional leaders towards S-L's alignment in the vision-mission-goal; incorporation into the structures and formal organizational; and solicits leadership commitment.
5. **Co-ownership with Key Stakeholders:** Key stakeholders include University leaders, faculty members, university staff, community partners and students; the stakeholders must embrace a common understanding of the S-L concept; work for a common goal and use the theory of change to achieve that goal; design stakeholder's orientation and dialogue; and develop strategies towards constituency building.
6. **Translate strategy to action:** Determine and analyze whether the mutually reinforcing activities will create systems change; translate the identified strategies into long-term and short-term action plans and implementing guidelines.

The "Bibingka Approach" facilitated the institutionalization of S-L in the university. This approach upholds that actual change works at various sides of engagement, with different entities interacting with each other at each of these sides create a successful synergy.

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2. Service-learning institutionalization in DLSU

The "Bibingka Approach" as the strategy used in S-L institutionalization illustrates the mutually reinforcing "fire from above" and the "fire from below". The reform measures are strengthened by actions on the side of which include, "fanning the fire" and "supporting the fire." To describe this approach, the succeeding sections concretize the experiences on how S-L institutionalization was realized.

A. Fire from Above: Leadership in Action

Plans and Policies

The zealous commitment of the DLSU President, Chancellor, and key administrators was vital in setting the "fire from above". This was evident in making S-L mandatory for each academic program by incorporating S-L in the university plans and programs.

The zealous commitment of the DLSU President, Chancellor, and key administrators was vital in setting the "fire from above". This was evident in making S-L mandatory for each academic program by incorporating S-L in the university plans and programs. The 2012 Strategic Plan indicated that

excellence in education anchored on Lasallian pedagogy and learning necessitates the integration of research, learning, and community engagement in the learning experience of all students. The Plan aimed to nurture zeal for service as a cornerstone of Lasallian education through the incorporation of community engagement/service components in academic programs.

Fostering the gains of S-L initiatives, the Strategic Plan of 2015-2020 explicitly specified the institutionalization of S-L as one of the primary university goals. A yearly target was made to ensure that 100% of undergraduate programs would have an S-L component. The university came up with a revised Strategic Plan 2018-2022 with a focus on progressing towards a more excellent, connected, and agile University by 2022. One of its key result areas in education targets that all degree programs to have implemented S-L. The Plan also indicated the expansion of S-L opportunities to include international communities or partner universities—i.e., Global Service Learning as one of its key strategies to achieve the result areas.

As a guide in the implementation of discipline-based S-L, the DLSU Faculty *Guide to S-L* was developed in 2013 and the *S-L Framework* was crafted in 2018. In Academic Year 2019-2020, S-L Fee was implemented to cover expenditures related to S-L activities in the community such as student transportation, community partner transportation, venue/equipment rental, and meals of community representatives assisting the students (CO-SCA, 2019). This is on top of the regular funds the program gets yearly for its operational expenses.

B. Fire from Below: Faculty, Staff, and Student Involvement

The S-L policies and plans mandated by the university were complemented with the active involvement of faculty, staff, and students refer to as the "fire from below".

The S-L policies and plans mandated by the university were complemented with the active involvement of faculty, staff, and students refer to as the "fire from below". Staff

development programs, incentives, and rewards systems supported this involvement.

Faculty Development

Several highly respected and influential groups of faculty members who are called "S-L champions" led in advocating and advancing the cause of S-L on the campus. These leaders and practitioners are faculty members teaching courses with S-L. They often participate in various S-L for a training, publication, and presentation of research papers locally and internationally.

In 2013, a workshop series on S-L definition and principles, models and best practices, and syllabi integration was held. For a large-scale audience, college-level and department-level orientations, as well as a yearly symposium/forum was conducted to spread awareness not only among faculty but also among administrators, partner organizations, and students.

While S-L is reflected in the strategic plans, the university sees to it that new faculty members and middle managers are equipped with the basic knowledge of S-L. In 2014, the university implemented a Leadership and Management Development Program for faculty members where S-L is one of the major topics. This program is a requirement for the permanency of new faculty members.

Moreover, faculty representatives regularly participate in the Service-Learning Asia Network (SLAN) meetings and conferences to report the DLSU S-L endeavors and to learn from the experiences of other member institutions from the region.

Faculty Incentives and Rewards

The university recognizes not only S-L efforts but all the social engagement initiatives of faculty members, students, and partner communities through the annual awards called "Gawad Lasalyano" (Lasallian Awards). This award-giving body recognizes the La-

The university recognizes not only S-L efforts but all the social engagement initiatives of faculty members, students, and partner communities through the annual awards called "Gawad Lasalyano" (Lasallian Awards).

sallian achievers for God and country with outstanding performance, contribution, and service in the fields of leadership, campus media, culture and arts, faith formation, sports, and community engagement. Several faculty

members have received this recognition for teaching courses with the S-L component for several academic terms.

Certificates of appreciation were also awarded at the end of each academic term to faculty members that teach courses with the S-L component. The S-L activities form part of the considerations in promotion and ranking. There was no indication of monetary benefits directly derived from S-L activities, however, faculty members shared that more than the incentives and rewards, S-L activities provide them with nonmaterial rewards such as the sense of fulfillment when their students contribute to the betterment of the community.

Another venue for development is conferences that the faculty members attend regularly is the bi-annual Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on Service-Learning which provides an opportunity to present research papers on S-L. The university offers financial support to faculty members in their participation in conferences as well as research incentives for papers presented or published.

Student Awareness and Involvement

Student's involvement especially during project implementation is vital in the S-L institutionalization process. To deepen the students' understanding of S-L, they are required to attend a classroom orientation containing a discourse on S-L definition and concepts, field policies, and general information about their partner organization. It is also during class orientation that the students are prepared for service activities as they are taught how to develop and prepare a service plan with the community.

Student Incentives and Rewards

At the end of the course, students are graded based on their learning and class performance. Students are assessed based on their submitted reflection papers, class participation, and group work. Students are rewarded with a certificate of recognition for successfully participating in the S-L community projects.

C. Fanning the Fire: Backbone support of COSCA Support

COSCA "fans the fire" by coordinating S-L activities of the faculty and students and facilitating the discussion on S-L in support of the actions from above and below.

Coordinating Entity and Staffing

The establishment of a coordinating entity with staff complement stirs up or fan the S-L institutionalization initiatives. This was done through the creation of a university-wide Service-Learning Program (SLP) under the auspices of COSCA.

The establishment of a coordinating entity with staff complement stirs up or fan the S-L institutionalization initiatives. This was done through the creation of a university-wide Service-Learning Program (SLP) under the auspices of COSCA. SLP provides

much-needed support for the colleges and departments in implementing S-L activities. The COSCA-SLP is the key office that co-manages S-L with the faculty and students. SLP has four regular and full-time personnel led by a coordinator. SLP develop and promote S-L-related guidelines; facilitate community activities; guide students, faculty members, and community partners during implementation of S-L projects; conduct research, documentation, monitoring, and evaluation; organize S-L training and symposium; and, build and sustain local and international partnerships for S-L.

Policy Making Unit

COSCA is one of the units under the Office of the Vice President for Lasallian Mission (OVPLM). The OVPLM's goal of our faith formation, social engagement, and community building programs is to allow each Lasallian to discover how they can contribute towards meaningful social transformation. The VPLM convenes the University Mission Committee (UMC) which is comprised of the Assistant Deans from eight colleges and representatives from other select offices. The UMC meets regularly to discuss, share, and decide about service-learning and other related concerns.

The Academics Council, where the VPLM is represented, serves as the policy-making body for all curricular or academic concerns. This is where policies and guidelines related to S-L are deliberated and decided on.

D. Sustaining the Fire: Partners' Support

COSCA has been key in bringing real-life struggles of the poor and the vulnerable sectors of society to the University through its partner communities and organizations. The community partners' commitment to support students' projects and contribute to their social formation "enhances the fire".

Community Participation and Partnership

The active involvement and support of the partner organizations help sustain S-L efforts. The community partners are groups and organizations (external), both public and private stakeholders, consisting of non-government organizations, people's organizations, faith-based organizations, cooperatives, schools, and local government units (COSCA-PNDP, 2020).

The COSCA Partnership and Network Development Program (PNDP) oversees this university and community partnership. It is responsible for the identification, selection, profiling, training, coordination, and monitoring of partner organizations. Prior to students' visits, PNDP and the community representatives conduct organizational and community needs assessments to identify needs that could potentially be addressed by students' S-L activities. It ensures the safety, convenience, and security of students through the conduct of pre-visits, ocular inspections, and constant communications with community representatives.

Community Partner's awareness

The SLP ensures that both the university and community representatives are aware of, sensitive to, and support each other's needs, timelines, goals, and capacity in implementing S-L activities. The representatives of the partner organizations and communities attend a formal orientation to learn about the university vision and thrusts, its social engagement framework, opportunities for engagement, and various programs including S-L. As student co-formators, the partner organizations undertake a formation program to prepare them for a university and community partnership.

Mutual Understanding

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is forged between the organization and the university to formalize their engagement. The agreement stipulates the expectations and roles of the university and the partner organization about S-L and other social engagement activities.

Community Partner's Voice and Leadership

Community representatives participate in the entire process of S-L project implementation. Together with the students, the community leaders are involved from project identification, planning, implementation, monitoring to project evaluation. At the end of each academic year, the partner organizations are gathered to assess their student engagement experiences, lessons learned, and recommend ways to improve them.

Summary and conclusion

The institutionalization of S-L in educational institutions is not an easy task. To sustain its essence and quality the concept and principles of S-L must be entrenched in the fundamental frame of the institution. Therefore, it necessitates a deep-seated transformation in perspectives and institutional mission and structures.

Institutionalization of S-L compels shift in academic paradigm. S-L introduces a pedagogy characterized by community-engaged teaching and learning.

Institutionalization of S-L compels shift in academic paradigm. S-L introduces a pedagogy characterized by community-engaged teaching and learning. This connects academic study with

structured community experience and contains analytical and reflective instructional approaches. S-L also establishes a pedagogy that promotes teaching and learning through engagement that builds good citizenship.

The institutionalization of S-L also requires institutional change. This means a) extending further than teacher's training and seminars to integration in the academic mission of the university and the institutional structures. Consequently, this demands work on alignment of S-L in the vision-mission-goal; b) fusion of S-L into the formal structures of the institution, commitment of the stakeholders, curriculum integration and syllabus development, and constituency building.

Towards this end, it requires: a) the active involvements of S-L champions from the top level of the organization to enact policy changes, from the bottom of the organization to advocate policy changes, and b) the key partaking of champions in organizing and facilitating S-L activities within and outside the campus. This process of change coincides with one of the Lasallian social development principles which are working in solidarity with peoples and institutions.

As a member of a community, of the nation, and of the global village, Lasallian institutions must work in solidarity with peoples and institutions that share the conviction in denouncing and working towards the elimination of unjust practices and social structures that deal death on the suffering majorities, promoting the participation of the underrepresented and implementing other life-giving interventions. (La Salle Provincialate, 2009, p. 23)

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Uniservitate is a global programme for the promotion of service-learning in Catholic Higher Education. Its objective is to generate a systemic change in Catholic Higher Education Institutions (CHEIs) through the institutionalisation of service-learning (SL) as a tool to achieve its mission of offering an integral education and training of agents of change committed to their community.

“We will not change the world, if we do not change education”

Pope Francis

4 Institutionalization of Service-Learning in Higher Education

This work aims to discover and highlight all the wealth within the perspectives of the different actors participating in the institutionalization processes of service-learning in Higher Education. Through the description of various global cases of service-learning institutionalization, the book presents reflections, actions and experiences that outline conceptual elements and key features, seeking to contribute to the great global debate on how and to which purpose processes allowing for the integration of service-learning into the identity and culture of Higher Education institutions are launched and developed.

We introduce this fourth volume of the Uniservitate collection with the firm intention of allowing readers to experience, through its pages, a journey across the different continents and cultures, exploring stories as diverse as the contexts and actors behind them, and to take on the challenges and dreams that we believe the book suggests, with a forward-looking approach, for those interested in a Higher Education that is more engaged with the world in which it unfolds its actions.

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Uniservitate is an initiative led by Porticus, with the general coordination of the Latin American Center for Service-learning (CLAYSS)

<https://www.uniservitate.org>



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PORTICUS

ISBN 978-987-4487-46-9



9 789874 448746

Published in April 2023
ISBN 978-987-4487-46-9