

**Report on State of Applied Learning  
March 4, 2005  
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*Method*

I interviewed each chair for all academic departments (n=17) using an unstructured interview format. Each chair was asked three open-ended questions:

- ◆ What do you consider the applied learning initiatives in your department?
- ◆ Who is/are the primary faculty involved in each of those initiatives?
- ◆ What are the roadblocks or challenges you see to applied learning in your department?

Each interview lasted from 30-60 minutes, and I recorded their responses in writing (not verbatim). Once all interviews were completed, I compiled the quantitative and qualitative results.

*Quantitative Results*

The institutional definition of applied learning includes four major categories of activity: (1) study abroad/travel, (2) independent research, (3) internship/practicum, and (4) service learning. All departments participate in some of these activities, but few departments participate in all.

- ◆ 12% of the departments reported activity in all four categories
- ◆ 41% of the departments reported activity in three categories
- ◆ 29% reported activity in two of the categories
- ◆ 12% reported activity in only one of the categories

Of the four categories of activity, independent research is the one in which most departments participate (88% reported activity in this category), followed by internship/practica (82%). Service learning had more modest participation from departments (47%). Study abroad/travel reported the least involvement (29% departments reported involvement in this category). Participation in each initiative category was roughly equal across the two divisions for study abroad/travel and independent research, although the disparity was a bit wider on internships and service learning, with the Professional Studies Division reporting more involvement on these initiatives.

<b>Initiative Category</b>	<b>LAS</b>	<b>PS</b>	<b>Total</b>
Study Abroad/Travel	3/11 (27%)	2/6 (33%)	5/17 (29%)
Independent Research	10/11 (91%)	5/6 (83%)	15/17 (88%)
Internship/Practica	8/11 (73%)	6/6 (100%)	14/17 (82%)
Service Learning	4/11 (36%)	4/6 (67%)	8/17 (47%)

A second level of analysis considered the level of faculty participation, not just departmental. The number of names each chair proffered as involved in the initiatives was counted. Names

that appeared multiple times were only counted once. Although numerous faculty were identified, a total of 88 faculty (48.3%) were identified by their chairs as involved in some form of applied learning that matches one of the four categories outlined above. This suggests that more than half of the faculty are *not* involved in applied learning activities. This percentage was roughly equivalent across divisions. Fifty-three of 112 LAS faculty are involved (47%), and 35 of 68 PS faculty were identified (51%). Of the 88 faculty identified by their chairs, 60% were LAS faculty and 40% were PS faculty, which corresponds closely to the expected percentages (62% and 38%, respectively).

### *Qualitative Results*

Chairperson responses were often overlapping in content. Themes that emerged from their responses are identified below:

- ◆ *Lack of clarity in the definition of applied learning:* 65% of department chairs indicated uncertainty regarding the institutional definition of applied learning. Some departments listed lab courses as their applied learning research initiatives, others explicitly excluded these. One department chair indicated that every single class in the departmental curriculum was an applied learning experience. Some departments listed student service as service learning, without tying it to a reflective course activity, while other departments had well developed service learning experiences grounded in course assignments encouraging reflection.
- ◆ *Load/Time/Compensation issues:* 76% of department chairs indicated that crediting/compensating their faculty for their work on applied learning was a challenge. Some departments felt this was more challenging for independent research while others tied it more to internship/practica experiences. Few departments mentioned service learning as a problem in this respect, however. Most departments believe that faculty need release time as a matter of course (without having to apply for it) if applied learning is to be a standing expectation; however, chairs are concerned that release time leads to an overuse of adjunct instructors in general studies courses.
- ◆ *Conflict with the Western Institute:* 46% of departments indicated difficulty in working with the Western Institute on applied learning initiatives. They cited communication problems and some financial questions involving the study abroad/travel and internship/practicum initiatives. Several chairs indicated they didn't understand how to interact with the Institute—its role in the applied learning initiative is unclear.

*Qualitative Results (continued):*

- ◆ *Other issues:* 18% of the departments mentioned funding for travel as a challenge to the initiative, 18% mentioned grading/evaluation of applied learning as a problem, 12% of departments described student work schedules as problematic, and 12% described definitions and compensation of internships as problematic. Other issues mentioned included standardizing time spent by faculty on these activities, concerns with the “point person” model of internships (using a single person as the initial contact to find interns rather than departments generating such relationships), the need for systematic evaluation of the initiative, the need to disseminate conference presentations locally, and concerns about how applied learning sets up a conflict between professional development and student development.

*Proposed Solutions/Activities:*

To address the lack of clarity regarding applied learning, I proposed that we develop a policy to be included in the *Western Policy Guide* that at the very least explicitly identifies the activities included in our institutional definition (the four activity categories). As we develop an institutional consensus on load related to applied learning, this, too, can be included.

To address the load issues related to independent study and internship/practica, I propose we re-invigorate the former committees that were dealing with these issues in a smaller form. I propose that an internship/practica committee composed of 7 individuals (4 from LAS, 3 from PS) be charged with studying how to equitably deal with load related to those activities, without forcing every department into a standardized model that may or may not fit their needs. I propose a similar committee form for independent study.

To deal with concerns that applied learning conflicts with scholarship and that travel funds are insufficient, I propose an Applied Learning Symposium to be held *this spring*. At this symposium, I propose that all persons who traveled for applied learning during 2004 present the work they shared at the conference they attended OR the information they learned there in a poster format. At that symposium, I will provide a poster that identifies professional organizations faculty might join related to each of the four activity categories, as well as conferences that specialize in these types of presentations. I will also have a poster that outlines how to access applied learning travel and research funds, including the criteria on which RFP's will be judged. This symposium will also address concerns that no local dissemination outlet exists, and could be held annually. Ultimately I hope it will provide a platform for the development of a national conference on applied learning.

To deal with concerns regarding assessment, I plan to interview each of the faculty identified by their chairs using a semi-structured tool. The tool will be focused on identifying standards to aim towards in each of the initiative areas. It, along with the concurrent literature review, will provide a basis for the development of quantitative assessment tools to be validated in the fall semester.

I am uncertain how to address the issues with the Western Institute. Many chairs are unclear on its role in the applied learning initiative. The faculty who mentioned the Institute in their interview appeared to have strong feelings concerning the Western Institute's leadership and their long term effect on the program.