

# 2013 National Assessment of Service and Community Engagement Qualitative Analysis (NASCE Qual)

Presented to the State University of New York at Fredonia

By the Siena College Research Institute (SRI)

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# Introduction

The Siena College Research Institute has worked over the last five years to develop the National Assessment of Service and Community Engagement (NASCE). While the survey provides valid and reliable data on service at participating institutions, we know that it is equally important to examine the cultural and structural influences that generate those numbers. In order to do so we are now conducting a year long, qualitative pilot analysis of as many as 20 previously surveyed colleges and universities from around the country ranging in size, demographics, region and POP score<sup>1</sup>. The data in this report is part of our ongoing investigation into community engagement practices at institutions of higher education, and while this qualitative follow-up research is primarily for our purposes, we are happy to provide you with findings. We hope that you will find this report interesting and useful as you move forward.

The NASCE began with the premise that while most institutions across the country express, in many different ways, support for community engagement<sup>2</sup> in their mission statements, that does not always translate into structures and a culture that committedly supports community engagement at their institution. The NASCE seeks to understand how an institution lives its mission in relation to community engagement. Since its start, the NASCE has surveyed nearly 60 institutions and over 30,000 students. The entire sample average POP score is a 17, a score that we place in the low range. Though no school has ever scored in the impressive range, we have discovered that institutions with scores in the moderate-high range are institutions where the mission is realized through structural and cultural supports for community engagement.

The State University of New York at Fredonia participated in the National Assessment of Service and Community Engagement in the Spring semesters of both 2011 and 2013. Fredonia achieved a POP score of 16 in 2013, based on the rate, frequency and depth of their students' service. While this is on par with the national sample average of 17, it falls in the low range, by our standards. This means that the average student contributes about 6.5 units of service<sup>3</sup> to the community, out of a possible 108 units, indicating that many students are doing several one-shot community service activities within a given year. This score is comparable to many institutions similar to Fredonia in type, size and demographic. Many schools with like POP scores also face similar challenges to Fredonia such as engaging students and faculty and fostering widespread campus engagement, allocating funds for community engagement programs and collaborating campus-wide.

Below are some of the key data points collected by the NASCE in 2013.

## Looking Back: 2013 NASCE Insights

- Forty-nine percent of Fredonia students report doing service of some kind. Prior to coming to Fredonia 90% of students reported participation in community service. This represents a drop of 41 percentage points.
- Based on Fredonia's POP score the rate, frequency and depth of student service is categorized in the low range. In all areas except Civic Participation, Religious Service and Youth the largest amount of service is done once or twice a year, at a one-shot rate.
- Sixty-four percent of students say they do service through a club/organization, 14% report doing so through a course and 22% say they serve as part of an individual project.
- Students at Fredonia hear about service most often in campus emails, word of mouth, on flyers and through a club. Eighty-three percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that SUNY Fredonia promotes community service among the student body. Only 14% report hearing about service from the Office of Volunteer Service and only 5% from the FACE Office.
- The areas with the highest levels of service were Youth and Health, followed closely by Civic Participation and the Environment. The lowest areas were Economic Opportunity, Homelessness, Religious Service and Elder Care.

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<sup>1</sup> The "Percent of the Possible" or POP Score combines each student's rate, frequency, and depth of service into one easy-to-understand score, for each of 9 areas of human need and overall. For more information please see Fredonia's 2013 NASCE Report.

<sup>2</sup> Community Engagement is defined as the extent to which colleges and universities serve the legitimate unmet human needs of people in their communities through the efforts of their students, faculty and staff members.

<sup>3</sup> Each student respondent's value for engagement, frequency and depth are multiplied to arrive at a raw score in each of the nine areas and then summed across those nine areas to find that respondent's total raw score out of a possible 108. This is called units of service.

# Qualitative Assessment

In September 2013, SUNY Fredonia was selected to participate in NASCE Qual. Fredonia's mission statement includes community engagement, indicating that it is something the institution finds important and relevant. Our aim with NASCE Qual is to further explore the structural and cultural factors that support or impede Fredonia from fulfilling its mission to "...educate, challenge and inspire students to become...responsible global citizens and professionals. The university enriches the world through scholarship, artistic expression, community engagement, and entrepreneurship..."

The three day visit was comprised of observations and campus tours, interviews with faculty and staff and focus groups with students meant to gain a deep understanding of the culture of the institution and the structures in place. The visit included interviews with the following:

- President of Fredonia College
- Admissions counselor (and took an admissions tour)
- Office of Public Relations
- 5 Staff members and higher administrators who work on community engagement initiatives
- 5 Faculty members from different academic departments who were both engaged with the community and utilizing service-learning pedagogy
- Four engaged students (students who participate in community engagement activities)
- Nine student leaders (students who are highly involved in campus life)
- Twelve First-Year Students
  - The focus groups totaled 25 students, 18 females and 6 males

This report is a combination of statistics from the NASCE survey administered at SUNY Fredonia and data from the Qualitative follow-up. Our research has some limitations to consider. First, the visit was only three days long and was conducted by a single researcher therefore we could not possibly talk to every individual or hear of every program in such a short time. We also did not explore the quality of programs or service done but simply interviewed individuals about their experiences with community engagement. While some can say that all research analysis is "perception based," following qualitative research conventions, we analyzed our interviews and observations to arrive at themes and juxtaposed our data with an "ideal" institution to arrive at this report. While there are some limitations to our research we are confident that it is consistent with Fredonia's previous quantitative outcomes.

We recognize that institutionalizing community engagement can be a large undertaking and we hope that both our survey and this qualitative follow-up can help support Fredonia through the process.

## "Ideal" Institution

In a perfect world all colleges and universities would be committed to enhancing, facilitating and supporting community engagement efforts. After examining previous research, surveying over 50 institutions and visiting schools across the country we believe we have an adequate understanding of the best structures and cultural constructs that engender and enhance community engagement. By combining these best practices we have created what we believe to be an ideal community engagement institution. "Institutionalization [of community engagement] can be represented...in a campus mission statement, presidential leadership, policy, publicity, budget allocations, broad administrative and staff understanding of and support for service learning, infrastructure, faculty roles and rewards, and service learning integrated with other aspects of institutional work (e.g., admissions, student affairs, financial aid, general education, long-term planning, institutional assessment)." <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Bringle, R. G., & Hatcher, J. A. (2000). Institutionalization of service learning in higher education. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 71 (3), 273-290.

# Seven Criteria for an “Ideal” Institution

## 1. Mission and Strategic Plan

An ideal institution would use its mission to guide its campus culture as well as structures, especially in regards to community engagement practices. This institution would translate the aspirations outlined in the mission into concrete goals, in a strategic plan.

## 2. Leadership

An ideal institution would have strong leadership at the presidential level, from higher administration as well as within community engagement centers. The president would be a driving force in increasing community engagement, faculty and staff would be supported by higher administration in their departments and the community engagement center would have consistent leadership with strong vision and low turnover rate.

## 3. Centers

An ideal institution would have one central engagement office with designated space, steady funding and adequate staffing with all-encompassing positions. This office would support all other offices on campus who work directly with students to utilize best practices and implement developmental pathways for community engagement.

## 4. Promotion and Terminology

At an ideal institution community engagement would be visible across the campus in things such as bulletin boards, flyers, campus newspapers, the school website and admissions materials. Community engagement would be often discussed amongst students, faculty and staff and promotion of such activities would occur via word of mouth. There would be an organizational, concrete method for disseminating information about community engagement, including specific information about developmental pathways for students. An ideal institution would also have a comprehensive terminology that is understood campus-wide by faculty, staff and students.

## 5. Faculty Engagement

At an ideal institution there would be training and resources for faculty to learn about service-learning, its benefits and how to utilize it in their coursework. Faculty, in different departments, would teach community engagement courses to students at all grade levels. There would be support for such practices in all departments, from higher administration and in tenure and promotion requirements. Students would know about their opportunities to take service-learning courses and understand the benefits.

## 6. Community Relationships

An ideal institution would be connected in many ways to its local and regional community. Students would be familiar with the community around the campus and would be given historical background and demographic information about the area, walking tours, and transportation to and from. The institution would also be aware of community needs and work to create strong, deep, community partnerships.

## 7. Developmental Pathways

At an ideal institution all students would perform service at a deep and frequent level. Structures would be in place to engage every student on a campus with service of some kind with developmental pathways for them to eventually reach deep and frequent service. These pathways would begin freshman year and continue all four years. There would be many entry points for students to get involved in service such as campus-wide service events, community engaged coursework, service incentives for clubs and organizations, service focused organizations and individual efforts. All service would be quality and include best practices such as reflection. There would also be a high level service corps on campus.

## Fredonia: Data and Observations

We have reviewed Fredonia's NASCE survey results and reiterated Fredonia's POP score of 16, which as we stated above, falls within the low range according to our calculus. We have also introduced an ideal institution best seen through seven criteria that relate to both structure and culture. We are now going to share some data and observations from the qualitative visit that we found to be important and relevant. Before we do that we would like to point out the importance of the combination of culture and structure. It is crucial to build, nurture and maintain structures for community engagement that apply to the seven components of an ideal institution while simultaneously developing and promoting a culture that supports and appreciates community engagement. An institution could not possibly institutionalize community engagement without the combination of culture and structure. Ideal schools work on and build ways to commit to community engagement through their campus culture and institutional structures and we hope by relaying our observations to you in this form we can help you to not only think about our data but also think about other ways the cultures and structures at Fredonia support or hinder community engagement.

### 1. Mission and Strategic Plan

#### *Culture*

- When students were asked about the mission during interviews and focus groups, most were not familiar with it, however, when faculty and staff were asked about the mission statement several could recite it or at least knew that community engagement was a part of it.
- One staff member said "You can actually see that the whole point of this here [the mission statement] is to inspire students to become skilled, creative, connected and responsible global citizens and young professionals and we take that very seriously, so it's right in our DNA if you will. If everyone is using those 34 words to drive their every action, it should never be too far from anybody's eyes."

#### *Structure*

- SUNY Fredonia is currently utilizing their strategic plan for 2012-2017 in which Community Engagement is a goal and states "SUNY Fredonia will be known as a respectful, supportive community, which stimulates and supports social, cultural, artistic, intellectual, and economic growth through multiple and diverse campus and community collaborations."
- Many of the goals outlined in the strategic plan are structural goals, working to increase and improve community engagement efforts already happening on campus.

### 2. Leadership

#### *Culture*

- Students spoke often about President Horvath and her support for service and volunteer work, saying things such as, "President Horvath loves community service." On several occasions students mentioned the Presidential Day of Service and spoke positively about their experience on that day.
- Faculty and staff spoke about the positive influence of the President, saying they have felt a "shift" and noticed that community engagement has been much more included in the mission and goals of the college since she became president.

#### *Structure*

- The president and other higher administration support community engagement efforts. The attention is on building and implementing structures from the top down.

### 3. Centers

#### *Culture*

- There is evidence that the two community engagement centers on campus have not fully grown into the culture of Fredonia because there was much confusion around where they were located, what their purpose was and how to get involved with them.
- When asked about the two centers, most students had heard of the Office of Volunteer Services or been exposed to some type of advertisements by them but only about half admitted to actually utilizing the center or participating in events put on by it. No students interviewed had heard of the FACE Center.
- One faculty member explained that "...people don't hear about the [FACE Center] because it has never had a physical space, it's a more abstract center with not the most sustainable model and a high staff turnover rate."

#### *Structure*

- There are two separate community engagement centers on campus. It is evident there is some collaboration between the two centers, however they have very different missions and goals, one with student volunteering and one with wider community engagement and academic service-learning.
- The Fredonia Academic Community Engagement (FACE) Center has several faculty and staff contributing to its efforts but has no designated space or many resources. According to staff and faculty members interviewed it seems that over the past few years there has been a considerable amount of staff turnover and inconsistent focus within the center.

### 4. Promotion and Terminology

#### *Culture*

- When asked what it means to be a Fredonia student the general response was "to be involved in a lot of different clubs and groups and academic interests." Service and community engagement were not mentioned as part of the "culture" of Fredonia.
- The terms "community engagement," "service-learning," "experiential learning," "community service," and "volunteering" were heard throughout the visit. Administrators and community engaged faculty used consistent terminology and there seemed to be a strong understanding of each term. Most staff and students did not understand or utilize any terms beyond "volunteer" or "community service."
- Overall there does not seem to be a comprehensive vocabulary used campus-wide and students, faculty and staff alike expressed that this makes things unclear. One faculty member stated, "I use [the term] experiential learning because I am doing academic research but there is service learning vs. internships vs. community service and it is all very confusing because we do not have common understanding."

#### *Structure*

- Students do not recall hearing about service during an admissions tour prior to coming to Fredonia, and stated they heard about it only briefly during orientation and then unless they got involved with a club or organization, they did not hear much more about it.
- During an admissions tour many flyers and posters were seen around campus, but not many portraying service opportunities. The Fredonia website homepage advertised the community service fair on campus. One individual stated that "If you go to our homepage right now you will see a slide show that shows we have a volunteer fair coming up next week. If you land on our website that is the first thing you see. It's something this campus obviously promotes."
- One student said "The school brings opportunities to you with the community service fair that happens each year. They show you what is available and what is out there so if you don't know what you are interested in you can go check it out." Many students agreed that after freshmen year students are less likely to attend this fair.
- Other students said they believe the volunteer services website is difficult to navigate and find it helpful when community service activities are on the homepage or advertised in other ways.

## 5. Faculty Engagement

### *Culture*

- Faculty discussed their own community engagement curriculum but all stated that either they were the only member in their department doing that type of work or that there was only one other individual doing so. One individual stated “We don’t have larger, broader, faculty buy in yet. They do it a lot in education and social work obviously...but it’s just pockets”
- Students discussed the role of their professors in getting them involved both in and outside the classroom. In some cases they even discussed ways their professors had engaged them in the community or provided them with ways to get involved with the community.
- Another student said “The more I got involved with my professors and in classes the more they gave me outlets to get involved with clubs and with service. If you show any sort of interest in a topic a professor will reach out to you with opportunities. It’s awesome...and it’s totally changed my college experience.”

### *Structure*

- On campus there is not currently a faculty development program for community engagement practices. One individual stated that “None of the three previous directors [of the FACE Center] really had experience facilitating service-learning. I’ve had to learn the best practices of service learning on my own the hard way...there are no workshops for development or help adapting to service learning.”
- Most faculty discussed having backing within their departments but also stated that while they were given permission to use community engagement pedagogy, no one supported or guided them through the process and research had to be done on their own. They also stated they believe a higher number of other faculty members would get involved if there was assistance creating community engagement coursework.
- There is a fourth credit option available for service-learning. Two faculty members interviewed described having utilized it. When students were asked about this option only five students had heard about it in classes they had previously taken. One student had tried to take advantage of this option before but the project had fallen through.

## 6. Community Relationships

### *Culture*

- Students discussed how the City Dunkirk has a bad reputation, with one remarking, “If you drive five blocks in the other direction from Fredonia [College] it’s a really bad area. We were told to roll up our windows and lock the doors when we drive through there...and from the moment we come on campus we are told to stay out of Dunkirk and spend our time in Fredonia...”
- Faculty and staff had a lot of positive things to say about the immediate area around the school, particularly the Village of Fredonia. In one interview it was stated that the “...school is insulated by the faculty members. Many of the faculty and staff who work here also live within a few blocks. This makes the area safe for our students and protects them from the surrounding bad areas.” It was also stressed that the school “does what they can to keep students on campus and provide activities for students to do here because there isn’t much to do around the area. Like there are no night clubs or anything like that.”

### *Structure*

- The most mentioned community service opportunities were beach/environmental cleanups, the small business incubator, ENACTUS, tutoring in Dunkirk/Fredonia and other youth focused events, and Relay for Life and other fundraisers.



## 7. Developmental Pathways

### *Culture*

- Interviews and conversations with students confirmed all the top motivations for student service. One student said “A lot of my involvement originally started with resume building but I have definitely become really passionate about it.”
- When asked how community service has affected them one student said “...you come to a school like Fredonia and you are exposed to different people and different ideas and community service opportunities and you learn what else is going on outside of your own little world.”
- Students expressed that the most effective way to get them to participate in community service is to reach them through a club/organization or in the classroom.
- Many students stated they did not know what was available to them to get involved with. Several students also expressed that “unless a student goes weekly to check the community service office and signs up for the one-time events it is difficult to get involved unless you are part of a club.”

### *Structure*

- When asked about what experiences were most memorable or impactful students talked about the experiences where they were given some background on the need they were going to be working to meet, when they could do the service with their peers and when there was a reflection component.
- One student said, “...when we got to debrief afterwards. We sat in a circle and talked about the most exciting thing and the most shocking thing and the happiest things that happened that day. It really made me think.”
- Most service discussed included campus-wide days of service, community clean-ups and fundraisers for charity all where large numbers of students are involved for one day only. Other service discussed was a program like VITA where students commit on a regular basis for a short period of time. “Signature events” were also discussed where clubs, organizations or Greek life partner with community organizations to complete a project or run an event a few times a year. Students interviewed did not provide examples of programs where they or other students committed on a regular and deep level.
- Students spoke positively about the requirement for clubs to complete events with the option of them being community service focused. Many of them expressed they are only involved with service because the clubs and organizations they are a part of do it and if they didn’t have this connect they wouldn’t seek it out on their own.
- Students voiced they are more likely to do service when someone else makes the arrangements for them, “If they [students] are told specifically, to their face, that there is an opportunity they can participate in if they come here at this day and time and there is no effort required on their part, then they will do it.”

# Summary and Recommendations

We recognize that the “Ideal” Institution we have developed may be a far-fetched goal, but we believe it is one to strive towards. While Fredonia certainly has established a place for service and community engagement on their campus, we believe there are some ways to improve the structures and cultures that support it. The recommendations below are suggested ways that Fredonia can commit to creating a stronger culture of service and implementing structures to enhance community engagement. If nothing else we hope that these findings and recommendations will facilitate a campus-wide conversation about the future of community engagement at Fredonia.

## 1. Mission and Strategic Plan

### *Summary*

- The Fredonia mission statement supports community engagement; however, there is not a consistent or pervasive understanding of it across campus.
- Fredonia should be commended for its strategic plan, which has a large focus on community engagement with goals to improve and increase the cultures and structures already in place on campus.

### *Recommendations*

- Fredonia should work to publicize its mission statement and strategic plan amid not only to faculty and administrators, but also amongst the student body. In order for the mission to lead the culture and structure at Fredonia, it must be ever present.

## 2. Leadership Support

### *Summary*

- Based on conversations with students, faculty and staff on campus the general feeling is that President Horvath and other administrative leaders support and encourage community engagement and volunteer work amongst students, faculty and staff. This contributes to the creation of a culture of service on campus.

### *Recommendations*

- Leadership should continue to speak publicly about the importance of community engagement and be sure to translate discussion about community to concrete actions.
- Fredonia should further incorporate students, faculty and staff members into the strategic planning process.

## 3. Centers

### *Summary*

- The staff and administrators who head the community engagement centers on Fredonia’s campus are highly dedicated, however, there are two separate centers on campus for service and community engagement and there does not seem to be strong collaborations between them. In focus groups and interviews students expressed confusion about these two centers and they were not fully informed about the location or purpose of them.

### *Recommendations*

- Fredonia should create one, unified center under which both the Fredonia Academic Community Office and the Volunteer and Community Services Office are housed. This office should oversee and track all service on campus and help to facilitate service and community engagement campus-wide. If a merge is not an option the two centers should actively create mutual goals and work together to meet them.
- Adding staff positions for a service-learning coordinator, faculty development, community outreach, and programming is important.

#### 4. Promotion and Terminology

##### *Summary*

- Many different terms were used across campus to talk about service and community engagement, creating confusion around the topic.
- In general, students stated that they most often heard about opportunities for community engagement in classrooms, through their clubs and organizations or from email.

##### *Recommendations*

- In order to create a culture of service, Fredonia should make service and community engagement a larger part of the Fredonia story and part of the common Fredonia experience.
- Fredonia should promote service and engagement opportunities to students where they can get involved with service on a more regular basis, stressing the importance of deep, sustainable service.
- Fredonia should also work to create a commonly used terminology that would be used by every person and group on campus. Consistently use those words in trainings, public announcements, writings, on the school website and when creating new structures for community engagement.

#### 5. Faculty Engagement

##### *Summary*

- Students expressed that faculty connections are extremely important to them and that faculty are often responsible for getting them engaged outside of the classroom. Most students had not previously taken a service-learning course or utilized the fourth credit option.
- On campus there is not currently a strong support system for faculty to get involved with service-learning or community engagement unless they seek this on their own and there is not larger faculty buy-in.

##### *Recommendations*

- Fredonia should work to increase the amount of faculty involvement in community engagement and the number of service-learning courses offered.
- Fredonia should provide support and resources for faculty in all departments to develop service-learning courses and to offer incentives to do so including promotion and tenure.
- Fredonia should work to advertise the fourth credit option and increase the number of faculty who utilize it by emphasizing its value not only in student learning but to Fredonia's mission.

#### 6. Community Relations

##### *Summary*

- There were many strong opinions about the community surrounding Fredonia, the common one being that the city of Fredonia was a safer place to live and visit while the community of Dunkirk is more unsafe and economically challenged.
- Students talked about a wide variety of community partners, expressing specific enthusiasm and pride for the Small Business Incubator.

##### *Recommendations*

- Fredonia needs to educate the campus about the communities of Dunkirk and Fredonia and their challenges and needs. Some ways to do this would be to include information about the area during freshman orientation, provide walking tours and historical information about the two cities or to offer courses that examine issues faced by these communities.
- Fredonia should work to increase the number of student volunteers who are regularly involved in the community at local non-profits or organizations.

## 7. Developmental Pathways

### *Summary*

- Many students talked about times where they participated in one-shot service events such as days of service or community clean up days. Students expressed that they are very likely to do service as part of their club groups because it provides an easily accessible opportunity for them. Students expressed that community engagement and service opportunities have opened their eyes to social issues they were not previously aware of and they enjoyed opportunities where they were led to reflect on their experiences.

### *Recommendations*

- Fredonia should work to implement developmental pathways for students so that service and community engagement becomes part of the typical Fredonia experience. This should begin freshman year and continue through all four years.
- Fredonia should work on increasing the number of hours of service, creating sustainable, long-term partnerships with community agencies, and utilizing community engagement best practices. One way to do this would be to create personal engagement plans for each student that enrolls in Fredonia to help connect them to the campus and to the community through service or other avenues.
- Fredonia should work to improve the quality and frequency of student service as part of clubs and organizations by implementing reflection components, among other best practices.