(Mis)Alignments Between Institutional Mission Statements and Service-Learning Handbooks

Charisse S. Iglesias
University of Arizona

The ongoing labor that (in)experienced service-learning practitioners put into practice is further intensified by the ongoing and persistent turn from traditional service learning to critical service learning (Mitchell 50). This turn shifts the misconception that communities are served, and universities are saviors and positions community-university partners as viable reciprocal partners that productively contribute to knowledge creation. To fully actualize the turn to critical service learning, however, practitioners must be supported on all fronts: institutional, training, programmatic, collaborative, etc. This study explores institutional framing as representative of institutional practice.

Considering my labor as a fairly new service-learning practitioner and researcher, I often question the tools given to me as I navigate community engagement. My personal background has been filled with trial and error. From the savior mindset I sported as a Peace Corps volunteer serving with wholehearted enthusiasm to my shaky community partnerships that ultimately take a backseat to my graduate research and writing, I have learned that community partnerships negotiate labor conditions. The emotional, physical, and intellectual labor necessary to manage expectations, intentions, designs, etc. is necessary for achieving reciprocal community-university partnerships. Regardless if that labor is explicitly negotiated, service-learning labor practices are intricate, delicate, and time consuming.

Charisse S. Iglesias is a Ph.D. student at the University of Arizona studying Rhetoric, Composition, and the Teaching of English. Her research interests include: critical service learning, community literacy, prison studies, comics studies, and program assessment and design. She was selected as one of ten first-time presenter recipients of the 2019 Conference on College Composition and Communication Scholars for the Dream Travel Awards.

While there are institutions of higher education that have explicit service-learning initiatives that train and support instructors—such as Berea College and Calvin College—I question whether institutional support is indeed necessary to succeed in the complex abstraction of service learning. Institutional makeup undoubtedly frames the proliferation of certain policies and practices, and absence in support could conceivably contribute to an absence in practice. Consequently, I wondered how institutions are framing their service-learning initiatives, and how intent is reflected in representation. This study is framed by the premise that institutions that self-identify as advocates for social justice, combatting the "hit and run" dynamic that runs rampant in community-university partnerships, are expected to perform social justice roles through their disciplines, policies, and actions (Bickford and Reynolds 234).

In this article, I examine the (mis)alignments between institutional mission statements and their institutional service-learning handbooks. Mission statements serve as the communicative act, promising to reflect an institution's values and goals. Communicative acts rely on perception to achieve their goals whereas service-learning handbooks—the counterpart to mission statements—serve as the performative act of an institution. The communicative act of institutional mission statements is to present an idea to the public whereas performative acts embody the idea.

The linguistic contact zone (Pratt 34) where mission statements and service-learning handbooks meet is the focus of this article. This study reveals institutional framing of those handbooks and considers how that framing could undermine the development of reciprocal partnerships in service-learning practice. The linguistic identities revealed in both communicative and performative acts are analyzed for their support toward community engagement, and the task of negotiating those linguistic identities, unfortunately, falls on the service-learning practitioner.

This study also measures the linguistic contact zone between mission statements and handbooks by uncovering their alignment levels. The purpose then is to expose the (in)consistencies between the communicative and performative acts, which facilitate discussion on labor conditions. If institutions fail to support their community engaged practices—despite communicating that they do—the labor of offsetting the lack of support falls on the practitioners. To identify points of unnecessary labor spent, an examination of what is expected and who fails to deliver leads this important conversation.

My research question: How aligned are service-learning handbooks with their institutional mission statements in terms of valuing community engagement?

Literature Review

Discussion on service-learning practitioner training reveals that institutional support is integral to implementing successful community-university partnerships. Labor-intensive practices like service learning rely on labor-intensive support to succeed and sustain. Many scholars argue that while service learning is a worthy endeavor, faculty do not receive the necessary training to execute independently (Boerngen et al. 177; Miller-Young 33; Kropp et al. 46). More specifically, Boerngen et al. noted that effort and time commitment are not explicitly acknowledged by many universities' faculty evaluation forms, indirectly disincentivizing service-learning endeavors (175). When the labor of initiating and maintaining community-university partnerships is not incentivized, practitioners struggle to justify the work.

To further disincentivize, the invisible labor of service-learning practitioners is "much more time consuming and emotionally draining than conventional teaching" (Correia et al. 10). Being flexible to accommodate unforeseen community partner relations is emotionally taxing, especially when "students rely on the instructors to close the gap between the textbook and real-world application of course concepts" (Davis et al. 65). Not all service-learning practitioners have backgrounds in community engagement, and those with good intentions and limited experience may be tackling ongoing and persistent problems with the wrong tools. Practitioners are not being supported to implement service learning in healthy and sustainable ways, and this leads to ineffective community partnerships.

A significant consequence of a lack of institutional support is the framing of community partners. Training influences the way service-learning practitioners use classroom pedagogy rhetorically. Inappropriate linguistic framing of the dynamics between community and university partners could potentially lead to what Eby calls "McService" or "quick fix service," which short-term, one semester service-learning projects naturally produce (2). Sustaining projects and community partnerships are also labor-intensive practices that need appropriate training to bring about. In particular, Eby illustrates how the use of the word *need* structures most service-learning projects "as a deficiency or as the lack of something a client needs or wants" (3). This linguistic framing points to the concrete consequences of not establishing training, supervision, and reflection practices that "give careful attention to sensitize students to see factors beyond those residing in individuals" (Eby 7). Unhealthy linguistic framing of the community partnership promotes the savior position of university partners, isolating the ivory tower and marginalizing community partners.

To support practitioners, Miller-Young explains that a community of practice allows practitioners to understand concepts like reciprocity through discourse, an admirable venture since the definition of reciprocity is disputed in the literature on service learning and community

engagement (Dostilio et al. 18). Establishing a starting point through which to define and teach reciprocity in service-learning classrooms "through discourse with others" helps alleviate inconsistencies (Miller-Young 34). Moreover, Kropp et al. attempt to reduce the onus on faculty to implement service learning independently by training student leaders to collaborate with faculty mentors (45). This practice shares the workload while also building leadership skills in students and evenly distributing knowledge creation with other stakeholders. However, not all institutions build mentoring models for effective practice. In other words, not all institutions do the work to make certain practices accessible. Therefore, the labor to create these programs and initiatives falls on the practitioners, the instructors, and the faculty that are not appropriately compensated for their work. The invisible labor that falls on practitioners makes it difficult for service learning to be a viable, sustainable practice that is recreated and shared by practitioners in manageable ways.

There is immense value in institutional support to incorporate service learning "into budgets and into faculty and staff loads" (Eby 6). Threading support through everyday practices builds capacity for practitioners and makes their labor visible and validated. Through institutional resources, training, mentorship, and ongoing assessment, service learning has the potential to navigate reciprocal community-university partnerships and break down bridges between the ivory tower and community. Unfortunately, practitioners cannot bear the burden of their disincentivized and emotionally draining labor without consequences. To investigate why labor conditions are inconsistent and unevenly distributed among institutional leadership, this study hopes to shed light on specific institutional resources that may indicate reasons for unfair labor conditions.

Methods: Data Collection
This study addresses the following research question: How aligned are service-learning handbooks with their institutional mission statements in terms of valuing community engagement? Unfair labor conditions exist when communicative and performative acts are not aligned; therefore, this study considers the (in)consistencies between institutional mission statements and service-learning handbooks.

To address the research question, I collected two sets of open access documents. First, I collected open ended documents called service-learning handbooks. They are lengthy documents that are locally authored and institution-sponsored; they are essentially how-to manuals on service-learning development. The handbooks range from 15-70 pages and describe best practices, complete with vignettes and sample lesson plans. They are PDFs, open access, and from four different types of institutions: Community College (CC), Private Research University (PRR), Private Liberal Arts College (PRLA), and Public Research University (PUR). This corpus was a convenience sample of the first handbook that appeared from

a Google search of "Community College Service-Learning Handbook." I chose to find two handbooks from four different types of institutions for greater variety, and all are from the continental U.S. The convenience sample models the process that inexperienced service-learning practitioners would use to find open access resources online.

Inside the handbooks, I located two key sections that holistically contribute to reciprocity in the service-learning classroom: sample reflective questions (implicit expressions of reciprocity) and the community partner's role (explicit expressions of reciprocity). The term implicit is used to denote indirect instruction to the service-learning practitioner. Sample reflective questions serve as implicit expressions of reciprocity due to their modeling function. Sample reflective questions are meant to guide practitioners to ask questions included or to model after them. Handbooks are catered to inexperienced practitioners, and sample reflective questions model length, linguistic framing, amount, and depth. Implicit could also refer to its interpretive value. Sample reflective questions merely model and do not provide specific instructions. Each set of reflective questions is contextualized, and the practitioner is meant to draw inspiration from the reflective questions, not copy directly. On the other hand, the section detailing the community partner's role serves as explicit expressions of reciprocity due to their straightforward instruction. These sections are direct instructions on how to engage in reciprocal behavior and include clear steps to achieve reciprocity.

Second, I concurrently collected the institutional mission statements of each institution represented in the handbooks, two from each type of institution: CC, PRR, PRLA, and PUR. Mission statements are the values and promises reflective of the institution of higher education and are typically found on the home page or about page of the institution's website. Mission statements vary in length but typically range from a few sentences to a few paragraphs. These are also open access, and none are labeled in this study by name. Mission statements were collected due to their reflective nature of the institution's policies and values.

Methods: Data Analysis

This study contains three phases to address the research question: critical discourse analysis of handbooks, content analysis of mission statements, and alignment rating of mission statements and handbooks.

First, I conducted a critical discourse analysis on sample reflective practices and community partner roles from eight service-learning handbooks (from four types of institutions) to measure the expression of reciprocity. Critical discourse analysis of a corpus unveils the inconsistencies and injustices about language on a wider scale (Wodak and Meyer 157), which best serves this study's purpose of locating the discrepancies of expressions of reciprocity, an agent of cultivating co-creating partnerships.

Second, I conducted a content analysis on the corresponding institutional mission statements to ascertain the strength of community engagement and social justice values. Mission statements were coded based on: inclusivity, diversity, communities, local/global issues. These codes refer to a values mindset to include diverse meaning-making processes and to demonstrate explicit attention to surrounding issues of the local and global community. I conducted a content analysis instead of a critical discourse analysis to account for the limited representation that mission statements may carry. Being poorly written or assigned to a junior staff member does not take away from the reflective component of mission statements.

Last, I compared the reciprocity rating from handbooks to institutional mission statements and revealed the levels of alignments. Alignment levels are calculated after rating both handbooks and mission statements. Final alignment levels are calculated by looking at the difference between each institution's handbook and mission statement. If the difference is large, that means the institution is widely misaligned. If the difference is small, that means the institution is aligned. The institutional mission statement-handbook alignments convey the communication between intent and implementation. If an institution receives a lower rating, this suggests there is severe misalignment between the communicative and the performative act.

Results: Critical Reflective Practices in Service-Learning Handbooks

The following results reveal the three data analysis phases to address the research question: critical discourse analysis of handbooks, content analysis of mission statements, and alignment ratings of mission statements and handbooks.

The following two examples are sample reflective questions outlined by two handbooks. They are from higher rated and lower rated handbooks, respectively. When evaluating reflective practices, those that are higher rated stimulate critical thought on the social, reciprocal, and logistical challenges working with an underrepresented community through open-ended and follow-up questions. This section keeps an eye toward the (in)experienced service-learning practitioner by modeling specific language patterns conducive to reciprocal community-university partnerships. When worded effectively, practitioners may find creating their own reflective questions manageable. Reflective questions, for example, that veer toward savior positionality help construct inequitable partnerships. However, reflective questions that encourage co-constructed meaning making help produce reciprocal partnerships.

PUR2 Handbook:
- What were your initial expectations?
- Have these expectations changed?

- Describe a person you've encountered in the community who made a strong impression on you, positive or negative.
- Has your view of the **population** with whom you have been working changed? How?
- What **institutional structures** are in place at your site or in the community? How do they affect the people you work with?
- What did you do that seemed to be **effective or ineffective** in the community?
- How can you **continue your involvement** with this group or social issue? [my emphasis]

PUR2 is rated first out of the eight handbooks and takes a relatively critical approach to reflective practices. Word choice, for instance, can be an important contributor to an inexperienced practitioner. These sample questions remark on *population* and *community*, rather than *people served*. Reflective practices model how practitioners frame inquiry and discussion.

PRR1 Handbook:
- What do you expect to experience at the service site?
- What do you expect **will be the impact** on the **service recipients** of this service activity?
- What do you think about the **problem** you will address through this service activity?
- What do you think about the **population being served** by this activity?
- Was the community problem addressed **through your service**?
- Did **you benefit** from participation in this service activity? What were the benefits? [my emphasis]

PRR1 is rated fourth out of the eight handbooks and takes a more savior approach to reflective practices. Again, with word choice, PRR1 chose to use phrases like *service recipients* and *problem* and *did you benefit*. These choices can contribute to practitioners developing a savior mentality while framing their own reflective questions to their students.

This section implicitly expresses a way to achieve reciprocity through modeling. Institutions that use effective wording—prompting practitioners to frame reflective questions that support community expertise and labor—rate higher in this small corpus. Additionally, labor that falls on service-learning practitioners decreases if institutional resources are straightforward and specific. In other words, if practitioners receive sufficient institutional support through training and resources, then labor demands are achievable.

Results: Community Partner's Role in Service-Learning Handbooks
The following two examples are sections highlighting the community partner's role in service-learning practice. They are from higher and lower rated handbooks. When evaluating these sections, those that are higer rated demonstrate explicit parameters of what constitutes equitable partnerships. Unlike reflective practices—which are implicit—these sections are explicit in (not) promoting reciprocity. This section explicitly instructs practitioners to manage the labor required to achieve reciprocal community-university partnerships. Appropriately wording and positioning this section also works toward making practitioner labor manageable.

PRLA1 Handbook:
- Community agencies are colleagues in service learning who assist the instructor and students in co-creating new knowledge while addressing critical issues in the community.
- Instructors meet **prior to the course** to explore possible partnerships. A partnership embodies **collaboration and reciprocity** to **articulate roles, responsibilities, and communication plans** . . . to ensure **rigor and accountability**. [original emphasis]

PRLA1 is rated third of the eight handbooks and approaches the community partner's role inclusively. Meeting *prior to the course* suggests that the university and community partner will identify an authentic community need together. It also suggests, both implicitly and explicitly, that community expertise is valued.

CC2 Handbook:
- **Once you have decided** on a project and you know where you would like to go for your project it is time to contact the agency.
- Talk in person [with your community partner] about the requirements and **give them a copy** of the assignments.
- Please **check in** with the agency coordinator throughout the semester to make sure your students are doing what you expect them to.
- At the **end of the semester** please have the agency coordinator fill out the evaluation form. [my emphasis]

CC2 is rated fifth of the eight handbooks and is less inclusive when it comes to the community partner taking a co-creating role. Identifying the authentic need comes before working with a community partner, suggesting that community input is not valued. Also, community partners are merely given a copy of the assignments, rather than creating them with the university partner to meet needs on both sides.

The sections on reflective practices and a community partner's role are effective in managing labor expectations when worded appropriately. The following table rates handbooks based on these two sections expressing reciprocity. The ratings are from 1-8, with 1 being the highest rated, and 8 being the lowest rated. The higher rated handbooks express reciprocity more successfully than lower rated handbooks.

Table 1: Service-Learning Handbook Ratings

Service-Learning Handbook Ratings	
Institution	Handbook Rating
CC1	8
CC2	5
PRR1	4
PRR2	2
PRLA1	3
PRLA2	6
PUR1	7
PUR2	1

Table 1 illustrates service-learning handbook rating by institution. Based on the analysis above, PUR2 rates highest in expressing reciprocity, which is meant to decrease the labor on service-learning practitioners to achieve reciprocal community-university partnerships. CC1, on the other hand, received the lowest rating, shifting unfair, disincentivized labor conditions to practitioners. If instructional resources are detailed, explicit, and comprehensive, practitioners can more easily achieve what they are meant to achieve. In other words, labor is significantly more manageable when practitioners know how to conduct the work they do. The next section on institutional mission statements rates the mission statements in this small corpus.

Results: Institutional Mission Statements

The sections above highlighted the performative acts of service learning. Performative acts are meant to reflect the intentions of what's communicated. As the performative act's counterpart, the communicative act lays the groundwork for the performative act to build upon.

The following are three snippets of the mission statements that correspond to the service-learning handbooks. What's emphasized is coded according to: inclusivity, diversity, communities, local/global issues. These codes refer to a values mindset to include diverse meaning making processes and demonstrate explicit attention to surrounding issues of the local and global community. Since these communicative acts represent the values of the institution, service-learning practitioners may expect the institution to follow through on these promises of valuing

community engagement. The labor that inevitably falls on practitioners due to limited or absent institutional support dramatically increases when institutions promise a certain set of values but practice the opposite.

All the mission statements use similar keywords, which are coded to inclusivity, diversity, communities, local/global issues. After entire mission statements were coded, they were rated based on the percentage of coded keywords. The following are examples of the types of phrasing and word choice with my emphasis in bold.

PRR2 Mission Statement:
- [We establish] **transformative living and learning communities**.
- Our goal is for students to develop practical wisdom, **global literacy, critical** and independent thinking, and an appreciation for life-long learning, **diversity and inclusion.**

PRR2 is rated first out of the eight mission statements in this small corpus. It was coded just on keywords—rather than whole sentences—that conveyed ideas of inclusivity, diversity, communities, local/global issues.

PUR2 Mission Statement:
- [We are] a comprehensive urban university of **diverse learners** and scholars committed to a**dvancing our local and global communities**.
- We value excellence in teaching, learning, and scholarship; student centeredness; and **engaged citizenship**.
- Our students become leaders and the best in their fields, professions, and **communities**.

PUR2 is rated second due to a smaller percentage of coded keywords in the mission statement.

PRLA2 Mission Statement:
- [We] respond to the **needs of our global and local communities**.
- [We] **dialogue with diverse cultures, perspectives and beliefs**.
- [We] **think critically** as responsible members of society.

PRLA2 was rated lowest due to the smallest percentage of coded keywords. PRLA2 has a relatively longer mission statement, and only 0.33% of that mission statement stated ideas that met the codes.

The following table shows each institution, the percentage of each mission statement coded, and the rating based on the percentage coded. Again, the ratings are from 1-8, with 1 being the highest rated, and 8 being the lowest rated. The higher rated mission statements have higher coded percentages than lower rated mission statements.

Table 2: Mission Statement Ratings

Mission Statement Ratings		
Institution	% Coded	Statement Rating
CC1	9.68%	4
CC2	2.56%	7
PRR1	11.87%	3
PRR2	14.97%	1
PRLA1	4.99%	6
PRLA2	0.33%	8
PUR1	8.99%	5
PUR2	13.33%	2

Table 2 depicts the percentage of each mission statement that meets the codes: inclusivity, diversity, communities, local/global issues. Percentages were calculated due to the varying lengths of mission statements. From these ratings, service-learning practitioners can be exposed to the varying levels of labor that institutions take on to communicate their commitment to community engagement. From just these ratings, a practitioner serving at PRLA2 institution, for example, would likely need to take on much more labor than a practitioner at PRR2. However, rating only mission statements may not be enough to estimate how labor is taken on and by whom.

The following table is a summative evaluation of institutional mission statements and their respective handbooks. The table shows handbook ratings based on how robust and extensive their sections of reflective practices and a community partner's role are. When handbook rating and mission statement rating are used to calculate a handbook-mission statement rating, the smaller differences receive a higher rating, and the larger differences receive a lower overall rating. The ratings are from 1-8, with 1 being the highest rated, and 8 being the lowest rated.

Table 3: Overall Ratings and Alignments

Overall Ratings and Alignments			
Institution	Handbook Rating	Mission Statement Rating	Handbook-Mission Statement Rating
CC1	8	4	8
CC2	5	7	5
PRR1	4	3	3
PRR2	2	1	2
PRLA1	3	6	7
PRLA2	6	8	6
PUR1	7	5	4
PUR2	1	2	1

Table 3 illustrates the summative ratings of handbooks, mission statements, and the final ratings. To receive an overall higher rating, the difference between the handbook rating and the mission statement rating needs to be lower. To receive an overall lower rating, the difference between the handbook rating and the mission statement rating needs to be higher. For example, the lowest overall rating belongs to CC1, which has a handbook rating of 8 and a mission statement rating of 4. The difference is 4, which is the highest difference between handbooks and mission statements of all institutions included in this small corpus. This means the CC1 handbook and mission statement are the most unaligned in the entire corpus of eight institutions. The highest overall rating belongs to PUR2, which has a handbook rating of 1 and a mission statement rating of 2. The difference is 1; therefore, the PUR2 handbook and mission statement are the most aligned. As you can see in Table 3, one other institution has a difference of 1: PRR2. However, after a more holistic review of the handbooks, PUR2 proved to be the more aligned institution in terms of promoting community engagement.

Discussion: Institutional Framing of Handbooks

In determining ratings, a commitment to community engagement and social justice served as the investigative lens. Institutions that communicate certain values must adhere to initiatives, policies, and practices that reflect those values. As such, the top-rated institution in this study that best aligns its communicative and performative act is PUR2. PUR2 earns that rating due to comparable commitments to community engagement in both the mission statement and handbook. PUR2 reveals a transparency to its stakeholders, faculty, students, and surrounding community. The lowest rated institution in this study that is most misaligned in the communicative and performative act is CC1. CC1 earns that rating due to unbalanced portrayals of an engaged institution. CC1

may claim values of service to the community and dialogue of tolerance but falls short of delivering on those promises.

Discussion: Institutional Framing Undermines Reciprocity

Seeing alignment ratings helps practitioners question how to conduct ethical community work without institutions modeling ethical behavior. If an institution contradicts itself to the community, its faculty, and its students, then service-learning—already described as an "ethically tenuous" practice—suffers (Jagla 74). If practitioners do not have access to support that enables certain key concepts (i.e., reciprocity, asset-based, co-knowledge creation), what will service-learning practice look like? The invisible labor practitioners are obligated to perform on top of existing labor conditions puts them at a disadvantage. Effectively collaborating and co-creating knowledge with community partners is essential to combating privilege and power struggles, and the labor to breach those initial discussions of students merely acknowledging systemic power conditions is made more difficult with ineffective or absent service-learning training.

Discussion: Evaluating Perception and Performance

Do institutions practice what they preach? Mission statements are symbolic. Even if mission statements are outdated or poorly written, they still exist to symbolize the promises of an institution. Based on these alignment levels, it is safe to assume that the more unaligned institutions suffer a disconnect between what is said and what is done, what is perceived and what is performed. Due to administrative neglect, we cannot trust how institutions portray themselves, which results in furthering the isolation of the ivory tower and miscommunication between the institution and the community. Isolation further clouds the institution's attempts at transparency and follow through and weakens an institution by hiding its exploitative practices. An environment of mistrust completely upends the words of inclusion and diversity the mission statement proclaims to value.

Implications and Further Research

It is important to note the factors that limit the implementation of reciprocal partnerships may reside outside the scope of this study. Institutional mission statements may not necessarily contribute to the limitation of effective community-university partnerships. Additionally, exemplary expressions of reciprocity in service-learning handbooks may not directly cause instructors to teach reciprocal partnerships. However, when examined together, the linguistic contact zone may give pause to service-learning practitioners who are hoping to instill habits of self-reflection and critical consciousness but are coming up short. Practitioners may harbor intentions for practicing reciprocal community-university partnerships but lack the training and institutional support. This study takes a change-oriented research perspective and calls for further action in

the development of reciprocal partnerships between community and university members in service-learning practice.

Action Items

Support manifests in different ways. If service-learning practitioners do not have access to support that enables certain key concepts (i.e., reciprocity, co-creation of knowledge, asset-based community-university partnerships), then intentions for successful practice are not meaningful, as expressed in Ivan Illich's address for the *Conference on InterAmerican Student Projects*. The following action items from this research on institutional framing are intended for (in)experienced service-learning practitioners:

- Commit to co-creating knowledge with your community partners:
    - Commit to identifying authentic needs of a community *with* your community partner. Schedule ongoing assessment meetings with your partner and defer to community expertise.
- Seek as many resources as you can:
    - Talk to people, do the research, assess constantly, and collaborate as much as you can.
- Compile best practices from the literature:
    - There is a breadth of research on critical service learning that can help structure your curriculum and ensure you're on the right track.
- Model after existing service-learning programs:
    - Service-learning programs like the one at Berea College require an Active Learning Experience (ALE) component of the General Education Program, which could be fulfilled through a service-learning course ("Courses and Projects").
- Consider if service learning is right for you:
    - Service learning is not for everyone. It may add a line on your CV, but you must consider the negative consequences of implementing service learning haphazardly. Your intentions of incorporating service learning will transfer to your students' intentions of practicing service learning.

Future Research

From this research on institutional framing of service-learning handbooks, I will continue investigating service-learning design using quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods following these research questions:

- What is the relationship between high occurrences of keywords that indicate reciprocity used in syllabi and practicing reciprocal community-university partnerships in service-learning practice?
- What are the factors that influence reciprocal community-university partnerships in colleges and universities that have a structured service-learning program or department?
- To what extent do pre-existing notions of reciprocity influence the practice of reciprocal community-university partnerships in training new service-learning practitioners?

Conclusion: Misaligned Promises of Institutional Labor

Exposing the linguistic contact zone of institutional mission statements and handbooks reveals the deep (mis)connections between the communicative act and the performative act. This could reveal institutional voice that is removed, irrelevant, lacking effective leadership, and, frankly, written only as a social justice performance. An absence in institutional support leads to labor in uncharted territory for (in)experienced service-learning practitioners, invalidating healthy and sustainable approaches to community engagement. This could lead to dangerous missteps and a devolving mentality toward working with communities (i.e., deficit-based, savior-saved thinking).

This study seeks to give a voice to the unbalanced representations of reciprocity in service-learning classrooms and seeks to situate the often-paradoxical outcomes of service learning in the broader institutional space that fails to embody a collaboration between values and action.

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