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Edited by Tawnya Azar

Community Engagement and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Affordances and Challenges of Service Learning in Crisis

SERIES IN EDUCATION

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Affordances and Challenges of Service Learning in Crisis

EDITED BY
TAWNIA AZAR



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About the editor

Tawnya (Ravy) Azar, Ph.D. is a Term Associate Professor of English at George Mason University. Azar has been an instructor of composition and literature in higher education since 2009 and has taught community-engaged classes since 2019. She also held a Faculty Associate position with the office of Civic Engagement at George Mason University for Community Engaged Teaching and Learning Support. Her community-engaged classes focus on the digital divide and include both placement-based and project-based service learning components, working with over ten community partners, participating in two Digital Inclusion awareness campaigns, and recruiting both nonprofit and industry stakeholders to hear student concept pitches. In 2021, she was nominated for Engaged Faculty Award, Social Action and Integrative Learning at George Mason University.

Summary

Community-engaged (CE) teaching is not a new concept. However, in the past several years, it has gained increased emphasis, as is evident by the changes to institution mission statements and the allocation of institution resources to support faculty development in CE teaching, as well as to support CE coursework and research.

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic forced many faculty members to pivot to an all-online instruction model, impacting community-engaged teaching and research in both predictable and unexpected ways. Community partners, facing similar struggles to serve their communities with restrictions on face-to-face interaction, were often too overwhelmed to work with higher education volunteers. Legally, universities could not ask students to risk their health with face-to-face community engagement. In fact, the number of CE courses decreased dramatically in 2020 and 2021 due to the unique challenges posed by the pandemic. At the same time, the pandemic presented some CE faculty with new opportunities for community-engagement. Some responded swiftly to the immediate needs of the local, regional, or national community with which they worked, taking advantage of the affordances of digital technology or capitalizing on the issues that the pandemic itself created or exacerbated. This collection captures the incredible work (of pivoting and innovating) in community-engaged teaching. With a primary focus on community-engaged teaching in higher education, this collection explores how faculty, students, and community partners navigated their work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, it raises important questions about how we might stay engaged with community during a crisis.

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