Over the past 25 years, the prevalence of service learning courses has steadily increased in higher education. This expansion has occurred across all types of institutions of higher education in the United States and across the spectrum of disciplines, with a reported rate of 7% of faculty teaching with service learning (Campus Compact, 2010). Internationally, there is a growing interest in the pedagogy, as represented by organizational networks across the globe (e.g., Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance, Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning, Latin American Center for Service-Learning), scholarship documenting regional case studies (Annette, 2005; Badat, 2003; McIlrath, Farrel, Hughes, Lillis, & Lyons, 2007), and cross-cultural comparisons (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008; Thomson, Smith-Tolken, Naidoo, & Bringle, 2011). Service learning has gained prominence in higher education as a high-impact educational practice (Kuh, 2008) and as an active learning strategy that provides both a rich set of potential learning outcomes and opportunities for educators to explore teaching and learning in ways that have implications for all pedagogies (Conway, Amel, & Gerwein, 2009; Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001; Finley, 2011).

Research by instructors and other practitioner-scholars who support teaching and learning involves systematic inquiry and reflective practice. Such investigation into the processes and outcomes of service learning and other pedagogies can improve instructional design, enhance abilities, and
increase confidence among teachers and learners alike; model scholarly practices for others; and contribute to a campus culture of inquiry related to teaching and learning. High-quality research can also inform campus policy, public policy, and funding activities of private foundations. In addition, such research holds the promise of deepening the understanding and practice of service learning, which has significant implications for a wide range of community and campus stakeholders. Service learning is rooted in the public purposes of higher education (Boyer, 1995); careful attention must be paid to its design, implementation, assessment, and outcomes to ensure that it fulfills these purposes.

The broadest goal of this two-volume set and other books in the *IUPUI Series on Service Learning Research* is to enhance the breadth, depth, and quality of research conducted in the context of service learning. Establishing a solid research agenda based on theory and building on prior work in order to improve the quality of subsequent research is the ultimate aim. Guiding, advancing, and improving research in any field of study requires a number of steps, including agreement on clear definitions, theory building, and mapping the terrain of what is already known (Hodgkinson, 2004). The chapters in this two-volume set address these steps, examining research related to service learning in five broad areas—students, faculty, communities, institutions of higher education, partnerships—from a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives (e.g., higher education, leadership, learning sciences, organizational theory, political science, psychology). Each chapter considers questions of theory, measurement, research design, and practice in surveying a particular topical arena of research (e.g., students’ intercultural competence, faculty development, institutionalization). Together, these chapters have important implications for research as well as for program and course design and assessment. All of these activities are dependent on systematic inquiry, analysis, and dissemination of results for peer review, which are characteristics of scholarship work. Thus, research on service learning has the additional benefit that it can contribute to the professional development of instructors in ways that should be acknowledged through the reward structure of institutions of higher education.

Many chapters have relevance to other forms of civic engagement (e.g., volunteering, political participation, advocacy, professional service in the community) and to related research activities (e.g., community-based participatory research), even though these are not the primary foci of these two volumes. Furthermore, although all of the chapters are intentionally focused on service learning within the context of higher education, researchers with
an interest in other contexts (e.g., precollegiate educational settings, service learning based in community organizations) may also find them relevant.

This chapter conceptualizes and defines service learning by articulating many of the components and variables that comprise the complexity of and inform the research on this teaching and learning strategy. Characteristics of high-quality service learning courses are introduced here and further examined in subsequent chapters. In addition, this chapter defines research and differentiates among research, program evaluation, and assessment. The chapter also serves as an introduction to both volumes in this set and provides a context for and description of the template used by the contributing authors.

Conceptualizing Service Learning

The beginning of wisdom is to call things by their right names.

—Chinese Proverb

Researchers in any field of inquiry must pay close attention to details, nuances, and conceptual clarity. Clearly delineating what is to be studied is one of the first steps in research, regardless of disciplinary perspective or methodology. Similar to other terms related to community-based activity (e.g., civic engagement, public scholarship, engaged scholarship, community service, volunteerism), service learning is “a complex phenomenon . . . comprised of multiple dimensions and, hence, many possible variables in research, which complicates inquiry” (McBride & Sherraden, 2007, p. 4). This complexity poses challenges to—and opportunities for—conducting research on service learning.

There are many definitions of service learning (e.g., Jacoby, 1996; Pragman & Flannery, 2008; Rama, Ravenscroft, Wolcroft, & Zlotkowski, 2000), and each may emphasize a slightly different orientation to or aspect of the pedagogy. Service learning is a socially embedded practice (Conway et al., 2009), and, therefore, different words are used—and avoided—in reference to it, reflecting the different assumptions, ideologies, norms, and identities of different personal, organizational, and cultural contexts. Although variation in language, conceptualization, and practice may be unavoidable, both within the United States and in international contexts, it can complicate the research process, particularly if the differences, along with their underlying
rationales and implications, are not made explicit. When there are multiple definitions and multiple practices associated with a single concept, “confidence in being able to accurately assess the meaning of this concept is compromised” (Finley, 2011, p. 18).

Defining service learning precisely and explicitly identifying variations in forms and structures provide a level of certainty about the construct in any particular context for inquiry and, in turn, enhance the ability of researchers and practitioner-scholars to test and advance theory and to understand and improve practice (McBride & Sherraden, 2007). Using a consistent definition within this series is, therefore, intentional. Despite variations, there is broad consensus that service learning involves the integration of academic material, relevant service activities, and critical reflection and is built on reciprocal partnerships that engage students, faculty/staff, and community members to achieve academic, civic, and personal learning objectives as well as to advance public purposes (Bringle & Clayton, 2012). For this series, service learning is defined as follows:

a course or competency-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in mutually identified service activities that benefit the community, and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility. (Bringle & Clayton, 2012, pp. 114–115, adapted from Bringle & Hatcher, 1996)

This definition identifies service learning as a pedagogical component of the formal curriculum that benefits the community in tangible ways and that incorporates reflection to support the academic, civic, and personal development of students. It also establishes that service learning necessarily involves civic education; civic learning comprises civic knowledge, skills, and habits (Battistoni, 2002; Billig & Eyler, 2003; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Eyler et al., 2001; Westheimer & Kahne, 2003; Zlotkowski, Longo, & Williams, 2006).

Each of the dimensions of the pedagogy encompasses variables that can be identified, measured, and explored through research. Variables that can be incorporated into research designed to explore and understand the design and impact of service learning as a curricular strategy include types of courses (e.g., first-year success seminars, general education, capstone), frequency and sequencing of courses within the curriculum (prerequisites, learning communities), and instructional roles (e.g., faculty, peer mentors, community mentors, graduate assistants). Partnerships encompass a range of variables that
can be explored to understand their influence on the process and outcomes of service learning; they also constitute a variable in course design that can be measured as a mediating variable, and they represent a tangible outcome insofar as they provide a foundation for additional activities. Student outcomes have received the most attention in research on service learning, yet little is known about what variables under what conditions lead to desired outcomes or about why documented outcomes are, in fact, achieved. This volume focuses on high-quality research related to many, but by no means all, dimensions of service learning.

**Designing Service Learning**

Requisite for high-quality research on service learning is well-designed and well-implemented service learning. Service learning has an explicit student learning focus, which is integrated with an equally explicit community focus; fundamental to strong design, therefore, is the conviction that it is not a form of volunteerism and is not the addition of service activities to otherwise unchanged learning activities. Intentional curricular design—grounded in well-articulated goals for both learning and service—is required to achieve the integration of service processes and learning processes that characterizes high-quality service learning. Service activities function analogously to the texts to be studied and analyzed in a course; thus, they must be selected or designed carefully based on how they supplement, illustrate, and augment other academic material. When designed and implemented appropriately, service learning encompasses multiple factors that are known to help students achieve in-depth understanding, including, for example, active learning, feedback, collaboration, cognitive apprenticeship, and real consequences with a safety net as a buffer against high-stakes mistakes (Marchese, 1997). These elements, which lead service learning to be identified as a high-impact pedagogy (Kuh, 2008), contribute as well to establishing a context that lends itself to high-quality research on a rich array of processes and outcomes across a wide range of stakeholders.

Within this set of features, pedagogical design is customized based on local context and the objectives and constraints of those involved. Service learning courses can range from the first-year to graduate level, and service learning can transcend a focus on individual courses and operate across courses in minors or entire degree programs (e.g., chapter 5.2: Jameson, Clayton, & Bringle, 2008). Service learning may involve short- or long-term
community-based activities, which, in turn, may consist of direct or indirect service (or both). Community may be on campus, in the local area, in another state or country, or online; it may include grassroots initiatives, nonprofit organizations, for-profit businesses, and government agencies. Explicitness and transparency regarding the specific form that each of these design variables takes in any given situation is necessary in order for research in that setting to inform theory, contribute to a knowledge base, and guide practice. Investigating the outcomes of service learning as a phenomenon without reference to the specific form it takes in any given instance is rarely helpful in advancing understanding. The same holds for designing and investigating particular components of the pedagogy.

Regardless of these design choices, community members are to be partners in the process of developing and implementing service learning, not merely recipients of service. Sigmon (1979) suggested that all participants in service learning learn, serve, and are served; such reciprocity in service learning partnerships is now seen as requiring “shared voice and power and insisting upon collaborative knowledge construction and joint ownership of work processes and products” (Jameson, Clayton, & Jaeger, 2011, p. 264). Not all relationships in service learning are reciprocal partnerships (Bringle, Clayton, & Price, 2009; chapter 6.1), and not all relationships or partnerships involve the same stakeholder populations. The SOFAR Model (Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, & Morrison, 2010; chapter 6.1) differentiates campus constituents into students, faculty, and administrators and community constituents into organization staff and residents (or clients); service learning activities and projects generally involve most, if not all, of these populations. Enos and Morton (2003) distinguish between onetime events, short-term placements, ongoing placements that involve mutual dependence, interdependent core partnerships, and transformational partnerships that involve joint creation of work and knowledge; they also distinguish between transactional and transformational orientations to partnerships. High-quality service learning is designed with attention to the full range of stakeholder perspectives and avoids the conceptual and practical confusion that can emerge from characterizations of campus and community as monolithic entities or of partnerships as homogeneous phenomena (chapter 6.1). Principles such as those developed by Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (2005)—establishing agreed-upon goals and outcomes, being trustworthy and respectful, building on assets while addressing areas for improvement, sharing resources, engaging in open communication, encouraging input from all participants, continually improving the partnership and its
outcomes, sharing credit—can provide helpful guidance in developing the partnerships on which high-quality service learning–enhanced courses depend and, consequently, in establishing a setting for high-quality research. These principles can also inform research on service learning in that the commitments of service learning to reciprocal partnerships transcend courses to include the full range of service learning–related activities.

The critical examination of service experiences and academic material through carefully designed reflection is the component of the process that generates meaning, new questions, and enhanced understanding and practice—for students in particular but also for any of the participants in service learning who see themselves as co-learners in the process. Reflection provides a vehicle through which service and associated activities (e.g., project planning, teamwork) can be analyzed and interpreted—much like a text is read and studied for deeper understanding—as well as improved. Reflection activities may be written, oral, kinesthetic, or audiovisual; they may be individual, collaborative, or both. They may take on a wide variety of forms, including journal entries, online chat sessions, poster presentations, essays, worksheets, drawings, audiovisual products, and discussion sessions. They may occur on a regular schedule and at serendipitous moments. Critical reflection may involve feedback—from student peers, instructors, community members, or service learning staff—and opportunities for revision. Principles of good practice call for service learning course design to integrate guided reflection activities that contribute to the intended learning and service outcomes by linking the service activities to the course content, and vice versa (Ash & Clayton, 2009; Hatcher & Bringle, 1997). Relatedly, critical reflection is especially powerful in improving the quality of learning and of service when integrated with assessment—using the same set of objectives, standards, and tools to generate learning (through reflection prompts), deepen learning (through formative assessment or feedback), and document learning (through summative assessment or grading and reporting outcomes) (Ash & Clayton, 2009; Bringle & Clayton, 2012; Whitney & Clayton, 2011). As with service learning overall and with partnerships, being intentional and specifying the details of and rationale for the design of reflection in any given situation is necessary in order for related research to inform theory and guide practice.

**Conceptualizing Research on Service Learning**

*Research* is a complex term because it can have so many interpretations. Elsewhere, the case has been presented that the term *research* should have a
particular meaning, specifically, that it should refer to inquiry that is theory based (Bringle, 2003; Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Bringle, Hatcher, & Williams, 2011; Steinberg, Bringle, & Williams, 2010). We suggest here that *research* should be used to describe activities that reflect convergence of theory, measurement, design, and practice (see Figure 1.1.1).

By contrast, program evaluation is largely descriptive in nature, does not typically test theory, and lacks generalizability because it is primarily concerned with the relevance of the data and inferences to a particular program. Program evaluation asks questions about *what* is happening in a particular context; research, on the other hand, inquires into *why* it is happening and the conditions under which it does and does not happen. As Patton (2002) notes,
Research, especially fundamental or basic research, differs from evaluation in that its primary purpose is to generate or test theory and contribute to knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Such knowledge, and the theories that undergird knowledge, may subsequently inform action and evaluation, but action is not the primary purpose of fundamental research. (pp. 10–11)

We would add to Patton’s thoughts that research should have a connection not only to theory but also to practice.

In a review of past research on service learning, Eyler (2011) offers the following appraisal:

Even well-designed research studies of [service learning] programs will be of limited value if they primarily replicate the growing body of literature linking service learning and particular service learning course characteristics to specific outcomes at only a descriptive level. There are many surveys that show small but marginally significant impacts of service learning on students; but there is little in these program evaluation studies that increases understanding of precisely how students experience and process the challenges they face in their work with community partners. (pp. 232–233)

The chapters in this two-volume set were guided by the recommendation that more and better research, not program evaluation, is needed to advance understanding of service learning and, in turn, of teaching and learning and civic engagement more generally. Research and program evaluation can be integrated into program evaluation research, which Furco (in Gelmon, Furco, Holland, & Bringle, 2005) identifies as a hybrid that encompasses meaningful feedback on a particular program but also is guided by research design and theory in such a way as to contribute to generalizable knowledge that informs others.

Another issue of terminology that is important to clarify is the distinction between research and assessment. Assessment can be undertaken in a variety of ways and for multiple purposes that include improving the implementation of a practice (formative assessment) and providing summaries of outcomes for reporting or grading (summative assessment); in higher education, formative and summative assessment most often concern student learning outcomes. As noted previously in the distinction between research and program evaluation, assessment may be concerned primarily with questions of what students are (and are not) learning, often in one particular context
and as a means to improving teaching and learning strategies in that context. Systematically asking why and under what conditions students are (and are not) learning so as to enhance the overall knowledge base related to teaching and learning builds on assessment in a way that becomes research.

Drawing on and generalizing the discussion of assessment in chapter 2, the work here is relevant to both of the distinct but interrelated tasks of assessment for research purposes and assessment for course (program) enhancement purposes. According to Steinke and Fitch (2011; chapter 2.1) strong assessment shares with research—as conceptualized here—an emphasis on the use of theory. Assessment at its best, they argue, is grounded in theory that can shape the articulation of outcomes, informs the development of appropriate instructional activities to cultivate those outcomes, provides direction for identifying indicators of those outcomes, uses multiple measures to assess complex constructs, and clarifies the interpretation of assessment results. Given this strong link to theory, assessment that targets improved practice (e.g., more effective teaching and learning) “can be viewed as action research to solve an immediate problem such as how to deepen student learning by improving service learning design” (chapter 2.1, p. 59).

The chapters in these volumes were guided by the intention to support more and better research—not program evaluation and not atheoretical assessment of outcomes—on service learning. The following sections in this chapter examine each of the four dimensions that we view as integral to conducting high-quality research, as expressed in Figure 1.1.1.

Theory

“All research, both quantitative and qualitative, is most beneficial when the design of research is guided by a theory and when the information that is gained through data collection is relevant to supporting, developing, refining, and revising a theory” (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000, p. 69). Qualitative researchers may or may not agree with that statement, depending on the degree to which they conceive qualitative research as generating theory but neither guided by nor testing theory. Accordingly, theory and theory testing might be associated only with a positivist view of research. However, action research, including on pedagogical topics such as service learning, can be theory oriented and can use theory to understand causal relationships among aspects of individuals, programs, contexts, and environments that enhance learning (Friedman & Rogers, 2009).
Giles and Eyler (1994) note that “service-learning, as a relatively new social and educational phenomenon, suffers from the lack of a well articulated conceptual framework” (p. 77). Dewey’s (1933) educational theory and Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory (based on Dewey’s work) are most frequently used as a basis for practice, research, and analysis. Bringle (2003) has advocated for theory from cognate areas to be clearly used as a basis of research. These could include, for example, theories from psychology about motivation, interpersonal relationships, and cognitive and moral development; from business about interorganizational relationships, leadership, and change management; from philosophy about value systems and decision making; from political theory about individual and collective action; from history about social movements; and from communication about conflict resolution. These theories can also enrich the logic models that are used to design service learning–enhanced courses.

There is an integral connection between theory and measurement because measurement must be clearly linked to constructs, which, in turn, are embedded in theories that should be formal and explicit (Bringle, 2003; Eyler, 2011). The theory or conceptual framework might precede the data collection, or it might emerge from or be modified based on data analysis and interpretation. Procedures for measuring quantitative or qualitative aspects of attributes do not stand alone, and their meaningfulness is often a function of how solidly they are situated in theory. This point begins to develop the interdependency among theory, measurement, design, and practice.

**Measurement**

Measurement is an underdeveloped component of research on service learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Bringle, Phillips, & Hudson, 2004). Measurement as used here refers to any systematic procedure that gathers information or evidence about the process and outcomes of service learning. As Wolcott (1994) notes, “Everything has the potential to be data, but nothing becomes data without the intervention of a researcher who takes note—often makes note—of some things to the exclusion of others” (pp. 3–4). Measurement is the process through which data are created.

All measurement needs to be meaningful as well as practical. One form is quantitative measurement, in which numbers are assigned to attributes of an entity, a situation, or an event according to some specified rule (Stevens, 1946). The term *attribute* is intended to be interpreted very broadly and to
encompass any feature that is of interest and that varies in some manner (e.g., intensity, frequency, duration, length). All approaches to quantitative measurement share the expectation of consistency when applied by different researchers to the same entity (i.e., reliable), and they will be meaningful (i.e., valid) insofar as they embody and document differences in the attribute of interest (Bringle et al., 2004; Steinberg et al., 2010). The numbers might reflect rank order (ordinal measurement) or equal intervals (e.g., intensity, time, frequency, amount). Whereas quantitative measurement focuses on the amount or intensity of an attribute, qualitative measurement focuses on kinds or categories. Numbers may be used to denote different kinds or categories (e.g., 1 = Republican; 2 = Democrat; 3 = Independent), in the case of nominal variables. Alternatively, qualitative data may be represented by words or phrases that are documented and represented in a non-numeric manner (e.g., themes, patterns).

Connections can be made between quantitative and qualitative measurement. Sandelowski, Volls, and Knaft (2009) contend that all quantitative data have qualitative attributes underlying them and that all qualitative data have quantitative properties. Furthermore, as clear as the distinction between quantitative (e.g., intensity, duration) and qualitative (e.g., kind, themes) data may seem, there are similarities between the two approaches. In either case, the best measurement will make clear the construct that is being examined and the integrity with which the procedures or rules align with the construct; the more transparent this process is, the greater the integrity or trustworthiness it will have. Both types of information can be gleaned from the same sources, including both individuals (e.g., verbal reports, interviews, observations) and documents (e.g., reflection products, written reports, webpages). Both approaches to measurement can be used to investigate processes, outcomes, and the relationship between them. Finally, in neither case should raw data be confused with attributes. Raw data (e.g., written narratives) are representations (samples) that may or may not be indicative of the attribute that is being investigated. The attribute is a hypothetical construct that is embedded in a theory, and the meaningfulness or trustworthiness of the research process must demonstrate the degree of connection between the raw data (e.g., IQ test score) and the attribute (e.g., intelligence). The rationale that establishes that relationship will depend on the theories, implicit or explicit, that guide the selection and interpretation of sampled evidence.

**Design**

Research design refers to the procedures that are associated with collecting and analyzing data. Just as measurement may be quantitative or qualitative,
so too can research designs be quantitative (e.g., quasi-experimental, experimental) or qualitative (e.g., ethnography, case study, phenomenological inquiry). Designs can also be mixed-methods. Creswell and Plano Clark (2006) provide a typology of methods that mix quantitative and qualitative methods, including (a) triangulation designs in which quantitative and qualitative data are collected concurrently, (b) exploratory and (c) explanatory designs in which data are gathered in two sequential phases, and (d) embedded designs in which one form of data is embedded in the other.

The appropriate design is best determined within the context of a theory and a particular set of research questions. It is the research design, whether quantitative or qualitative or mixed, that determines the integrity with which inferences can be made or conclusions generated based on the information or evidence collected. Theories typically implicate causal statements, and, for quantitative research, research designs differ in their capacity to support causal inferences from the research (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Steinberg et al., 2010; chapter 1.2). Qualitative research designs focus on interpretation of information and typically emphasize not testing theory but uncovering theoretical connections. Research designs are discussed in more detail in chapter 1.2.

**Practice**

Perhaps the most obvious connection between practice and research is the conviction that the choices made in the process of instructional design—for example, whether students will receive feedback on reflection products and, if so, from whom; which decisions are made by faculty and community organization staff and which are made by students; how civic learning is to be defined; and what criteria are to be used to assess student learning outcomes—need to be informed by what has been learned through research and scholarly practice. The conceptualization of research as comprising theory, measurement, design, and practice, however, assumes a multifaceted understanding of the relevance of practice, well beyond it being merely an arena of application for results of research.

First, strong research requires a strong foundation of pedagogical design. As discussed earlier, although service learning invites—indeed, requires—customization to context, there are defining parameters, necessary conditions, and well-established principles of good practice that need to be adhered to, both in order to produce strong outcomes for all involved and in order to provide a context for conducting high-quality research in the
context of service learning courses. Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning: A Wingspread Special Report (Honnet & Poulson, 1989) identifies, for example, (a) opportunities for critical reflection; (b) clear service and learning goals for everyone involved; (c) clarification of responsibilities of everyone involved; (d) training, support, recognition, and evaluation related to both service and learning goals; and (e) participation by and with diverse populations. Howard (2001) synthesizes such principles of good practice as (a) give credit for learning not for service, (b) establish learning objectives, (c) establish criteria for selection of service placements, (d) prepare students for learning from the community, and (e) minimize the distinction between the students’ community learning role and classroom learning role.

Second, given the philosophical commitment to and practical necessity of customized design of the pedagogy—customized with consideration of the characteristics and goals of the full range of constituents and the particular opportunities and constraints of the situation—research on service learning needs to explicitly acknowledge and be designed in light of variables in implementation. Otherwise, investigations that purport to be of the same phenomenon in fact are not, and comparisons become meaningless. When the implementation of service learning is intended to provide a context for investigating the pedagogy’s processes or outcomes, that implementation needs to be designed intentionally with an eye to both the immediate desired outcomes and the requirements of good research design. Approaching service learning as the scholarship of teaching and learning enables strong linkages between design for learning and design for research. Perhaps more often in service learning than in other pedagogies that involve fewer stakeholders and that present everyone involved with less dissonance (Clayton & Ash, 2004; Howard, 1998), these two foci—research and learning—may be in tension with one another (e.g., an instructor may need to modify planned reflection strategy in response to challenges that students are facing learning through reflection even though doing so will distort the desired data set).

Ultimately, the same commitment to using theory to guide research and to design research so as to generate and refine theory applies to practice. Paraphrasing Lewin (1952, p. 169), there is nothing more practical than a good theory. Lewin’s message was twofold. Theorists should try to provide new ideas for understanding or conceptualizing a (problematic) situation, ideas that may suggest potentially fruitful new avenues of dealing with that situation. Conversely, applied researchers should provide theorists with key information and facts relevant to solving a practical problem, facts that need
to be conceptualized in a detailed and coherent manner. More generally, theorists should strive to create theories that can be used to solve social or practical problems, and practitioners and researchers should make use of available theory. Service learning research builds on this acknowledgment of the interconnections between theory and practice and invites a more nuanced understanding of the relationship among researchers, theory and theorists, and practice and practitioners. It positions everyone involved as a co-generator of knowledge and, more generally, challenges dichotomies, such as those often perceived between theoretical and applied research or between researchers and practitioners. Service learning researchers are frequently themselves practitioners, and vice versa—thus, the significance of the integrated identity of practitioner-scholar or scholar-practitioner.

Chapter Template

The goal of Research on Service Learning: Conceptual Frameworks and Assessment is to stimulate more and better research on service learning. The conceptualization of research as involving theory, measurement, design, and practice guided the development of the chapters. We invited the authors to discuss research in their particular topic areas in terms of all four of these dimensions. We asked them to introduce theories and measurement approaches from cognate areas, to use those theories to critique extant research studies (including designs and analyses), and to integrate those theoretical lenses with what has and has not been undertaken and learned in work to date in order to generate recommendations for practice and an agenda for future research. Table 1.1 summarizes the template provided to the authors.

Each chapter provides useful information to practitioners and researchers alike. The structure of each chapter is intended to make transparent the rationale for practice recommendations in terms of both theory and past research. In addition to highlighting aspects of practice that may be particularly salient from the perspectives of theory and research, the chapters support deepening program evaluation into program evaluation research that is grounded in and advances theory. The concise summaries of relevant theories—many of them not well established in the service learning literature to date—as well as the reviews of past studies, the compilation of tools and methods, and the recommendations for future research are intended to facilitate high-quality research by new and veteran researchers and by
TABLE 1.1.1
Chapter Template

*Introduction and Scope of Chapter:* Why is this topic important to issues of research and assessment in service learning? What are the key definitions related to this topic of inquiry?

*Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks:* What are key relevant theories from both within and beyond the field of service learning that can be used to advance research on this topic?

*Critical Evaluation of Past Research:* What has been done? What do we know from that work? What are the limitations of past research? What remains unanswered? What are the strengths and shortcomings of research to date in light of the theoretical frameworks discussed earlier? In terms of research design?

*Measurement Approaches and Instruments:* What are the existing tools, approaches, and instruments that could be used or modified? What are their strengths and weaknesses?

*Implications for Practice:* What are the recommendations for interventions and programs? What should practice and programs look like given what we know? How should service learning be designed so as to support both best practice and future research?

*Future Research Agenda:* Based upon the theoretical frameworks and the research that has been conducted to date, what implications and recommendations are there for future research? What are the most significant and pressing questions?

*Summary and Conclusion*

*Recommended Reading*

practitioner-scholars. The range of topics addressed includes but goes well beyond student outcomes, calling attention to the significance of current and future research related to faculty, communities, institutions, and partnerships as well.

**Future Directions**

We admire the skill with which the authors contributing to this volume have developed and refined perspectives that can enhance future research on
service learning. We expect that the theoretical perspectives they bring, their critiques of past research, the measurement approaches and tools they review, and the recommendations they offer for practice that is informed by research and can enhance settings for research will all contribute not only to the visions for research that they have presented but also to additional research possibilities.

The thinking generated by and documented in these chapters was framed by a particular understanding of service learning and catalyzed by a particular set of guidelines that we, as editors, specified to the authors, whom we invited to focus on particular topic areas. The definition of service learning that framed this project limits the pedagogy to a course-based context and, therefore, carries with it certain assumptions about the activities (e.g., for credit) and does not invite exploration of alternative conceptualizations (e.g., co-curricular service learning). Many of the same theoretical perspectives and questions that are considered here are relevant to other understandings of service learning and other approaches to civic engagement more generally. Much could be learned, for example, by comparing and contrasting the development of intercultural competence (chapter 2.5) and the sources of faculty motivation (chapter 3.2) in curricular and co-curricular service learning; by designing and investigating partnerships that intentionally integrate curricular and co-curricular service learning to target multiple systems and levels of analysis (chapter 4.1); by examining the dynamics of student affairs units as engaged departments (chapter 5.2); and by viewing multiunit collaboration within an institution through the lens of interorganizational relationships and partnership entities (chapter 6.2). We invite such application of the wide-ranging theoretical frameworks gathered in this volume to a much broader set of contexts for service learning.

Many additional focal topics that are not included here certainly fall within the realm addressed by each section of this work. Part Two, on students, for example, lacks explicit consideration of graduate students as a potentially somewhat distinct student population with its own particular set of key outcomes (e.g., research capacities, professional development). Additional theory related to adult learning, professional socialization, mentoring, and identity formation in the context of academic disciplines could be brought to bear to advance understanding and practice of service learning and civic engagement with this population. A focus on P–12 schools could inform research on community outcomes of service learning (Part Four)—for example, outcomes experienced by P–12 students, their parents and other caretakers, and community organizations that provide programming for
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youth—and research on partnerships in service learning (Part Six)—for example, partnerships among P–12 schools, between P–12 schools (of various types) and higher education institutions (of various types), between faculty in Colleges of Education and cooperating P–12 teachers, and between university students and youth. The examination of learning outcomes for students (Part Two) and faculty (Part Three) needs to be broadened with parallel consideration of community organization staff, residents, and administrators as learners in service learning. Relatedly, the exploration of faculty as co-learners with students in chapter 3.3 only begins to uncover the complexity of positioning all partners in service learning as co-educators, co-learners, and co-generators of knowledge; theory from a variety of disciplines related to the dynamics of reciprocity, paradigm shift, and epistemology could advance research and practice well beyond this rhetorically powerful, but perhaps not yet fully operationalized, framing of partnerships. More comprehensive use of the SOFAR Model that helps to frame Part Six (see chapter 6.1) than is attempted there invites investigation of the full range of partnerships in service learning, including, for example, those that faculty do or can engage in with faculty developers or other campus-based professional staff, with staff at community organizations, and with community residents; those between community organization staff and community residents; those between campus-based staff and community organization staff; and those within any particular stakeholder population (e.g., faculty with faculty).

That this set of volumes has as its guiding framework the use of theory from a variety of cognate areas is both a strength and a limitation. The approach is multidisciplinary, with each chapter emphasizing one or more theories that can contribute to research on service learning. However, very little attempt has been made to integrate these perspectives so that the discussion is interdisciplinary in nature. Furthermore, and perhaps most significantly, this approach directs attention to the value of borrowing from other fields and disciplines rather than emphasizing the development of novel theoretical frameworks, measurement tools, research designs, or practices that are inherent to—if not unique to—and, thereby, perhaps best suited for service learning as its own emerging field. In effect, the approach used here maintains and replicates as the status quo the work of existing disciplines from which the authors borrowed. One significant consequence is that the analyses of extant research and the recommendations for future research offered in the chapters are heavily anchored in a normative, social science orientation to research. In some ways, then, the approach taken can be viewed as antithetical to and incompatible with the ethos of service learning.
and with emerging models of civic engagement that emphasize democratic, participatory processes that are focused on justice and social change (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). Researchers, practitioners, and practitioner-scholars should continue to explore and debate the integrity and usefulness of alternative epistemologies and their associated methods of inquiry (e.g., ethnographic, feminist, phenomenological) in the process of systematically investigating service learning, with an eye to the possibilities for ever-tighter alignment between the ultimate purposes of the work and the processes that we use to understand and advance it.

References


Friedman, V. J., & Rogers, T. (2009). There is nothing so theoretical as good action research. *Action Research, 7*(1), 31–47.


