Article

Changing landscapes for community-engaged learning in Vietnam: Exploring excitement and confusion in community-campus partnership development

Huong Tran and Kevin Kecskes

Abstract

Change can be both exciting and challenging. Given that higher education in Asian contexts is changing rapidly, and especially so in Vietnam where approaches in higher education are currently experiencing significant shifts, it is not surprising that actors experience both enthusiasm and challenges.

Pedagogical and research approaches in Vietnam are transforming from more traditional techniques to ones that engage community members in myriad ways. The increased prevalence of powerful interactions with faculty and students in community-based, partnered settings – for the express purposes of augmenting educational outcomes, building stronger communities, and establishing community-campus partnerships for social change – can be empowering as well as destabilizing. Based on eight years of on-the-ground experiential/experimental action and research, this analysis: 1) briefly explores the history of community-campus partnership development focusing on service-learning/community-engaged learning (SL/CEL) in Vietnamese higher education; and, 2) presents early findings regarding what stultifies and/or motivates various higher education institution (HEI) and community actors in Vietnam to engage in community partnerships and SL/CEL practices.

Finally, the authors provide a set of recommended actions intended to broaden, deepen, and further institutionalize SL/CEL practices in the current context of Vietnamese campus-community partnership development.

Keywords

Vietnam, motivation, community-engaged learning, service-learning, partnerships, higher education change.

Introduction

The 21st century is about change, accelerated and often exponential change. With the passage of the new law governing higher education in Vietnam in 2012 – and subsequent revisions in 2016 and 2018, and the 2019 dispatch prescribing how policies and executives of teaching/learning, conducting research, and community service must be planned, monitored and evaluated as critical quality requirements in higher education – everything started to change. The arrival of these new directives created an opening for new, private higher education institutions (HEIs) to emerge. As the higher education landscape expanded in Vietnam, the associated crowding among private institutions, as well as between private and state-run institutions, increased competition among HEIs for students and faculty. Pedagogical and research creativity was encouraged; many faculty experimented with service-learning/community-engaged learning (SL/CEL).

Today, after the establishment of the first SL/CEL center in Ho Chi Minh City 20 years ago (Halimi et al., 2014), there are now scores of these types of community engagement and community-campus partnership support centers that have been established on campuses across the country. As we discuss in detail below, the motivations for this emergence are multifaceted, including student and faculty desire to increase prosocial behavior, a desire for HEIs to modernize and internationalize the curriculum, and to conform with "the (new) law(s)." Our findings confirm and extend the limited, extant research on this topic (Nguyen et al., 2023). To support these centers and their affiliates, a national higher education SL/CEL support network has emerged called Vietnam Campus Engage (VCE). VCE also supports over 500 active faculty in its Vietnamese Network of Engaged Scholars (VNES). This new freedom to experiment with SL/CEL and engaged research strategies is both exciting and challenging for practitioners, including for students, faculty, administrators/staff, and community partners.

This manuscript outlines initial findings from over eight years of practitioner-based experimental and experiential research regarding the fears, hopes, and motivations of Vietnamese actors who have implemented one or more of these community-engaged strategies.

Theoretical Framework / Literature Review

The literature on the emergence of SL/CEL and SL/CEL institutionalisation in the United States and Europe has been well established (Campus Compact; AAC&U; AASCU; IARSLCE; University Societal Engagement; Furco, 2002; Kecskes, 2013). Concomitantly, significant research on student motivations for SL/CEL in particular (Muturi & Mwangi, 2013; Sze-Yeung & Chi-leung, 2020), as well as faculty, community, and institutional motivations are also now widely available (Gelmon, 2003; Burns, 2011; Darby & Newman, 2014; Gelmon et al., 2018). For a variety of historical, cultural, political, and other reasons, there is a dearth of research on SL/CEL development, motivations, and challenges focused on Vietnamese HEIs and associated actors.

This research employs an exploratory research approach which "...attempts to discover something new and interesting by working our way through a research topic" (Swedberg, 2020, p. 17). At the core of our research are emerging responses to base line questions that are designed to better help researchers understand what motivates (and sometime confounds) various SL/CEL actors in Vietnamese HEIs and surrounding communities.

Methods

Over a time period of approximately eight years, primary data collection methods included:

- Online survey through the VNES network – which produced 60 responses (cleaned data included 43 respondents);
- Deep, semi-structured interviews – which produced 20 responses; 10 with Vietnamese engaged scholars based on their responses to the Furco (2002) institutionalisation rubric, and 10 with select Vietnamese HEI staff focusing on opportunities, motivations, barriers, and other challenges regarding the implementation and sustainability of SL/CEL in Vietnamese HEIs.

Informants from HEIs are of the two groups: stated-owned HEIs and privately-owned HEIs that support a center or office for SL/CEL or SL/CEL activities. All of the informants are registered members of VNES (Vietnam Network of Engaged Scholars). Informants that are community-based hail from organizations that are working with Vietnamese HEIs in SL/CEL activities/projects. Informants are:

- Faculty / instructors;
- Administration leaders / officers;
- Leaders of universities;
- Leaders / officers of community organizations;
- Students.

Secondary data sources include:

- Testimonials from scholars, HEI administrators, HEI leaders, and community partners;
- Testimonials of concerns, interests, and discussions with and from many scholars in several national and international conferences/workshops about SL/CEL in Vietnam since 2016; and,
- Results of surveys and research associated with Vietnamese HEIs about their SL/CEL activities.

Data collection strategies employed include:

- An online survey that focused on identifying which HEIs have

SL/CEL activities and which are interested in the development (or further development) of SL/CEL. Results from this survey enabled researchers to identify appropriate informants for potential deep interview follow up and potential case study development (July, 2022);

- Deep, semi-structured interviews were conducted so that informants could articulate specific stories about the development of SL/CEL activities on their HEI campus. Questions focused on specific successes and their causes, failures and challenges and their causes, motivations from faculty, staff, students, administrators, and community partners. Particular attention was paid to gathering information from geographically diverse, active SL/CEL practitioners from both state-owned HEIs and privately-owned HEIs over a 13-month period (July, 2022 – August, 2023).

Data

Quantitative Research Results (Source: Online survey of 43 VNES scholars, conducted July, 2022)

Demographics:

- 65.1% of respondents are associated with state-supported HEIs; 27.8% from non-state, privately owned HEIs
- 74.4% are instructors; 9.3% are major/department/HEIs' leaders

Frequency of Engagement

- 46.5% have engaged in SL/CEL activities or research
- 44.5% plan to conduct SL/CEL activities in the near future

Figure 1. *Types of SL/CEL activities*

The majority of informants report that SL/CEL activities are credit-bearing.

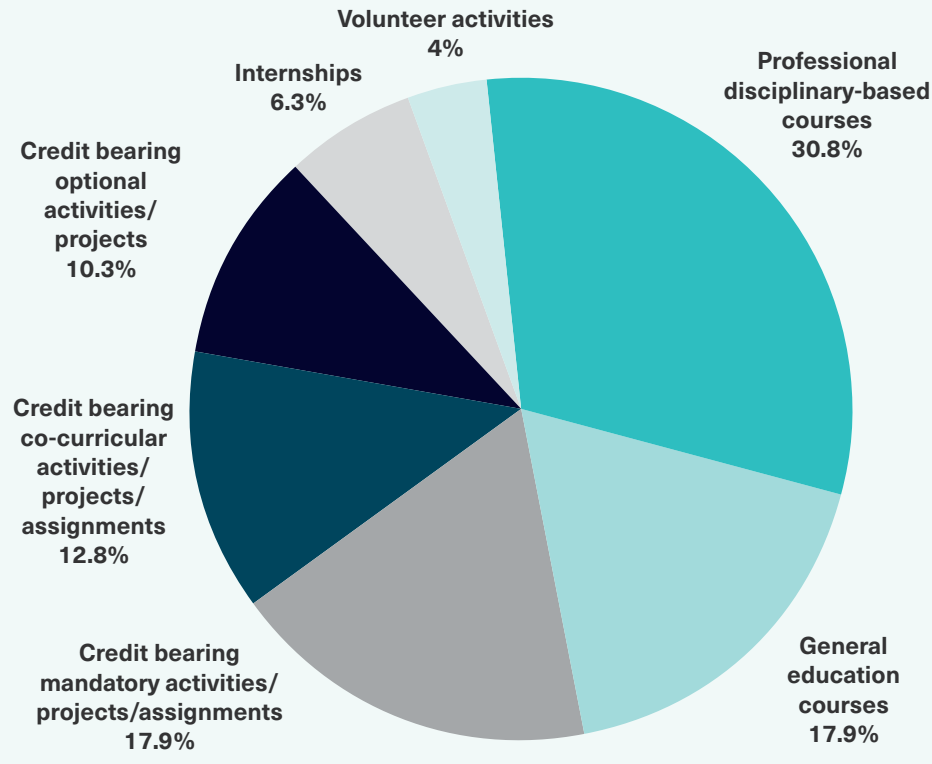


Figure 2. *Initiation of SL/CEL activities*

This chart provides a breakdown outlining which university entities/ organizations initiate SL/CEL activities.

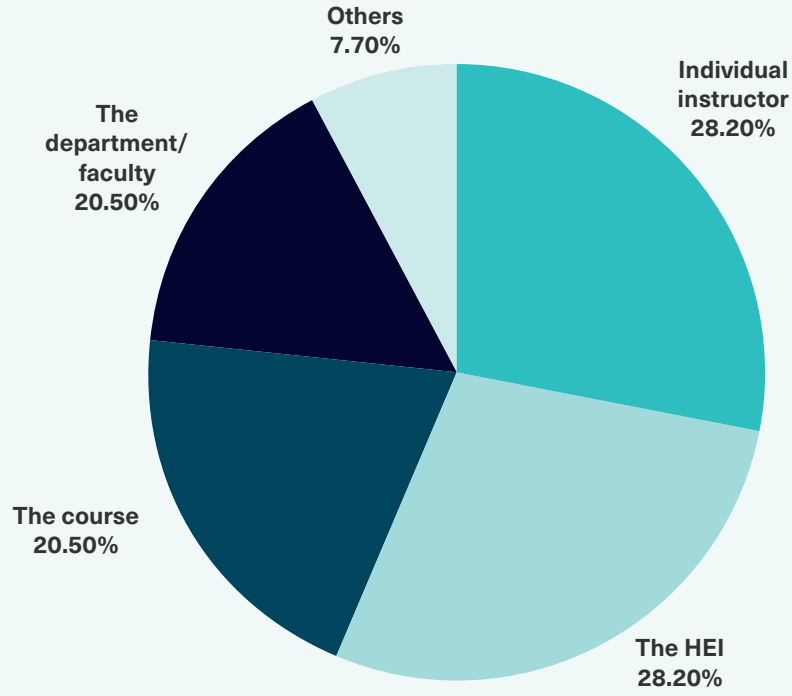
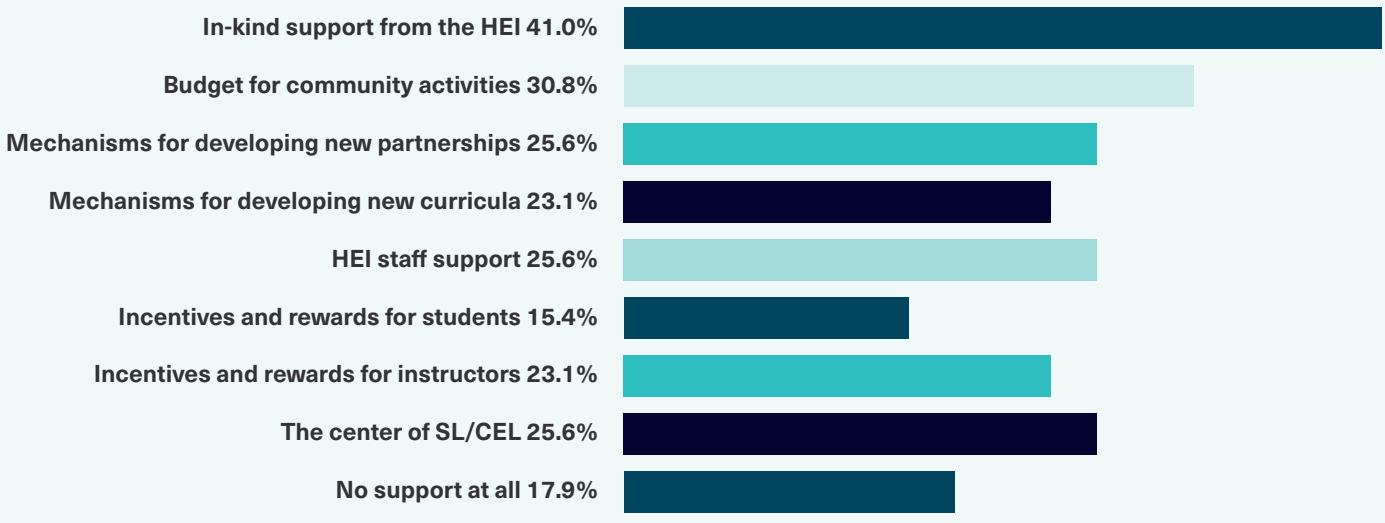
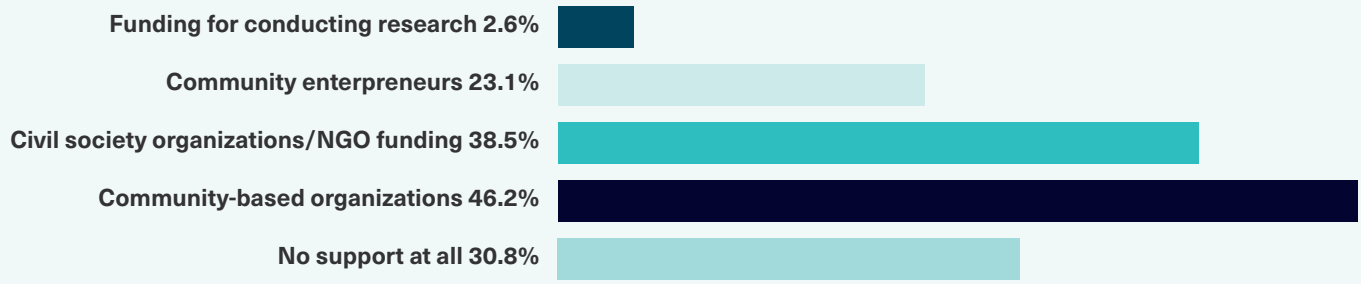


Figure 3. *Sources of support for CL/CEL activities from host HEI*



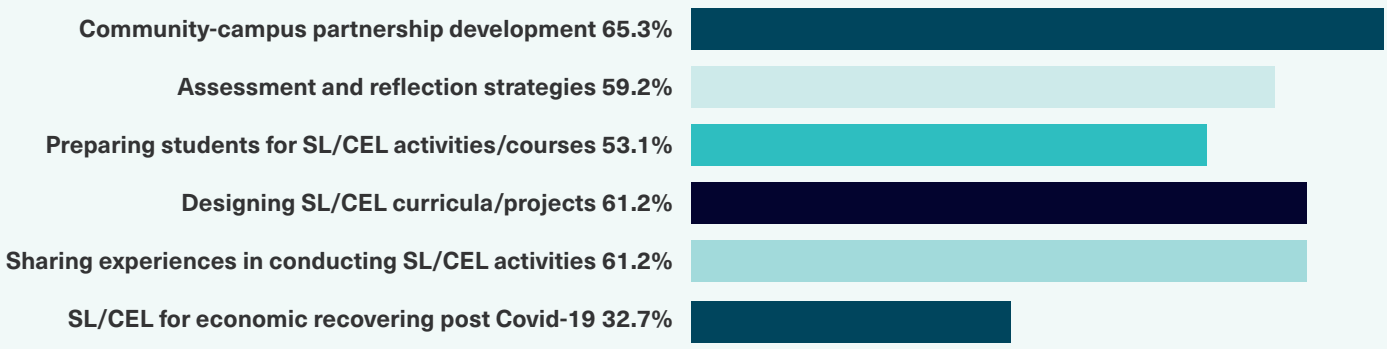
"Sources of support" in this case generally, but not only, focuses on financial support, including: travel and scholarships for students and faculty; miscellaneous costs to run programs; in-kind allocation of staff time; increased hourly pay for instructors; equipment; and various additional incentives that create favorable means and conditions to encourage SL/CEL. "Budget for community activities" here refers to actors' ability to access a budget targeted for volunteer work and national-level campaigns such as "Green Summer." This funding is generally targeted toward political activities of the HEIs rather than to learning activities. Some HEI leaders are allowed to use portions of these specified funds for SL/CEL.

Figure 4. *Other resources supporting SL/CEL activities*



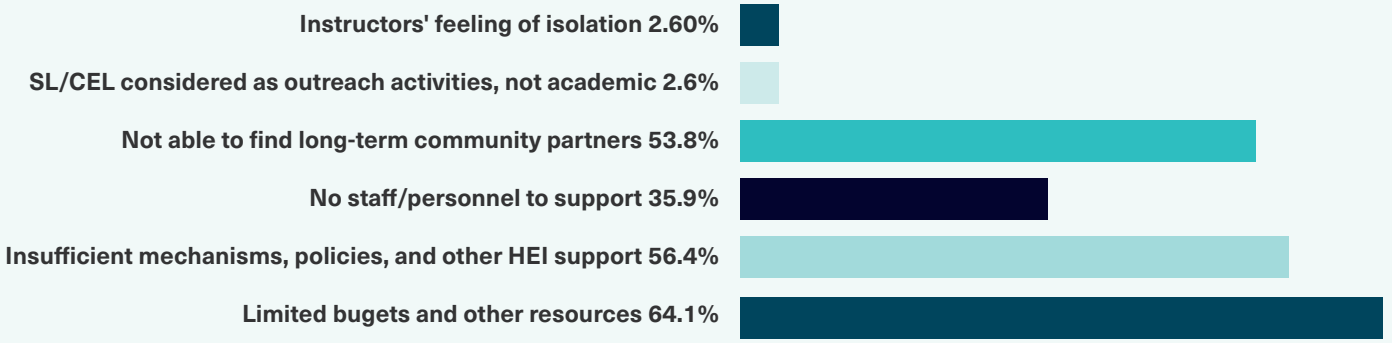
In many cases, faculty members responded that mobilizing required funding to support SL/CEL activities has been possible from in-kind sources as well as local entrepreneurs, NGOs, or other community-based organizations. However, a significant percentage of respondents (30.8%) disclosed that they had not received any support/funding for SL/CEL activities.

Figure 5. *Types and frequency of capacity building requests*



Most actors from HEIs indicated significant need for capacity building, particularly in designing and conducting various SL/CEL core activties as well as general community-university partnership building support.

Figure 6. *Challenges for Instructors*



Major challenges identified by instructors are securing funding, inability to identify and sustain long-term community partners/partnerships, lack of staff support for SL/CEL activities, and university-level policies in support of community-engaged work.

Qualitative Research Results: Motivations and Challenges

The source for these data were deep, semi-structured interviews conducted July, 2022 – August, 2023, with active scholars from ten HEIs with a high level of SL/CEL activity. Respondents were initially identified based on active VNES participation. The interview questions were informed and framed by the *Self-Assessment Rubric for Institutionalisation of Service-Learning in Higher Education* (Furco, 1999). Preliminary analysis of our data suggests that Vietnamese HEI actors involved in community-engaged activities express great enthusiasm for CEL, but also confusion and concern – in part based on the nascent nature of this emerging, relatively new curricular and research approach in Vietnamese HEI partnership with community constituencies.

Motivations

Generally, motivations for SL/CEL participation include: 1. increasing pro-social activity; 2. a need for modernization; 3. the law; and, 4. perception of increased and diversified student learning.

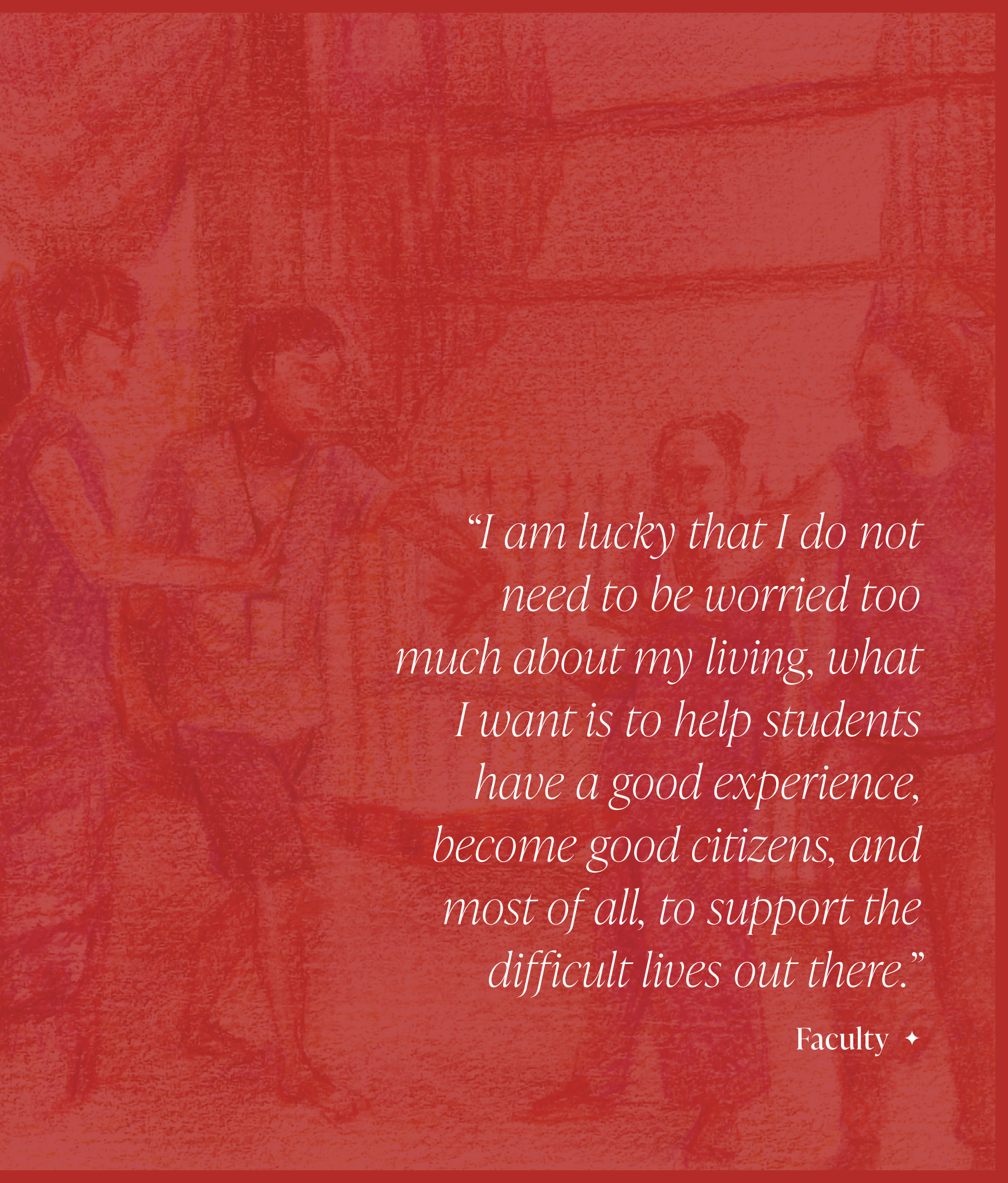
1. A desire for engaging oneself and one's students in prosocial activity ("doing good things for society"). This was the most consistent response provided by diverse actors throughout this research endeavor.

One faculty member shared:

> ***"I am lucky that I do not need to be worried too much about my living, what I want is to help students have a good experience, become good citizens, and most of all, to support the difficult lives out there."***

Another mentioned,

> ***"Our society has been so focused on survival which makes many good values get undermined. People today are more practical, material-oriented, and deceitful. That's the context of education, particularly higher education. It creates generations of young people that have no ideals, work and live for money, and do not seem to have any clear moral values/ethics. The main motivation for community-engagement, for me, is to make a change to the youth."***



"I am lucky that I do not need to be worried too much about my living, what I want is to help students have a good experience, become good citizens, and most of all, to support the difficult lives out there."

Faculty ✦

2. A need for HEIs in Vietnam to have multiple 'modernization' and 'internationalization' strategies (Tran, et al., 2020), due in part to increased HEI autonomy and decreased dependency on government funding. This new landscape has now created an emerging competitive market in Vietnamese HEI. At the core of this competition is a need and ability to attract more students.

Representatives of one state-sponsored HEI noted that:

> ***"CEL is part of the mission of our university, one of the four main roles (besides research, innovation, and defining strategy). SL/CEL is also one of the main factors to develop in the next institutional 5-year plan. The HEI does not have a definition of SL/CEL at the present but has many ways to encourage instructors, faculty, and students regarding SL/CEL projects, courses, and research, such as offering awards, incentives, and outlining new criteria for performance evaluations. Several instructors of this HEI have joined VNES and other groups to learn more about SL/CEL and to attract more funding and support from outside Vietnam for SL/CEL and other community-based research/project efforts."***

Clearly, as mentioned earlier, recruiting students for admission into the university is on the minds of Vietnamese faculty and senior leaders. One interviewee mentioned "the 'success' of our department in term of student recruitment, where the number of students in our department equaled that of the rest of the entire university, convinced leaders to support and invest on our community activities even though they (leaders) may not share the same values we pursue." In another case, where a faculty member received an award from the Ministry of Education and Training for cutting-edge SL/CEL work with members of a school for children with disabilities, the project received much attention as well as promotion from the home HEI. The HEI then hired personnel for developing of CEL, developed and promulgated new policies to encourage SL/CEL including: offering scholarships for service-learners; providing funds for SL/CEL projects; and augmenting incentives for faculty who have SL/CEL activities. Another respondent mentioned:

> **"I could have another job with a much higher salary but I want to continue what I am doing because with it I can bring values and positive changes to society. Recently, another non-state HEI contacted me and my department and wanted to recruit the whole team to their HEI. This shows the strong competition in this area now for HEIs in Vietnam."**

Finally, one high level administrative leader suggested:

> ***"Our students deserve to have these values/services which are new, modern, and from developed countries' HEI strategies which are different from the status-quo of HEIs in Vietnam. These community-oriented values are significantly changing the quality of students' learning environments in Vietnam and we should highlight these in our HEIs' statements."***

3. "The law": Most informants (leaders of HEIs or faculty) refer to "the law" when discussing why their HEI or faculty apply SL/CEL. The Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET: 2012, 2016 and 2018, referenced earlier) now requires institutions to integrate social service into curricula.

Based on analysis of active membership and consistent activity in VCE and VNES membership, it is clear that newly established, private HEIs are more prominent in developing SL/CEL when compared to state-supported HEIs. Some of these newer HEIs consider SL/CEL as a main communication strategy (including specific branding for the HEI), and view SL/CEL as representing "innovation and modernization" that

has been mandated by MOET for higher education in Vietnam. Many of these newer HEIs in Vietnam now have established support centers for SL/CEL, apply and adopt the model of SL/CEL broadly, invest funds and resources for these activities, and communicate regularly about SL/CEL activities. Respondents underscored that, in general, non-state/private HEIs in Vietnam are more flexible in terms of mobilizing resources for innovations such as SL/CEL, locating funding to support the establishment of a support center or office of SL/CEL with dedicated staff, modifying mission statements in support of community-university partnerships, providing incentives for faculty, and creating credit-bearing SL/CEL courses in multiple disciplines.

4. A perception of diversified and accelerated student learning opportunities.

Most informants, including faculty and many heads of disciplinary majors, shared the opinion that SL/CEL increases and deepens student learning, as well as 'whole person' education. Respondents often referred to creating "life changing experiences" for students as well as personal pride that projects/courses they have developed are making positive community impacts. One respondent noted:

"Students who have gone through SL/CEL activities become more passionate and more confident about their profession, have more skills such as problem-solving and proposal writing, are more committed with community members in their field work, and are able to work more independently and with an entrepreneurial spirit. They are also more successful in their professional lives upon graduation."

Motivations for engaging in SL/CEL in Vietnam are multidimensional and generally mutually reinforcing. These include, 1) a desire for engaging oneself and one's students in pro-


THANH NIÊN
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"KHÔNG GIAN XANH"

social activity. 2) The need for HEIs in Vietnam to have multiple modernization and internationalization strategies due in part to increased HEI autonomy and decreased dependency on government funding. 3) "The law": referring to a series of edicts put forth by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET: 2012, 2016 and 2018, referenced earlier) which now requires institutions to integrate social service into curricula. And, finally, 4) The perception that SL/CEL facilitates, diversifies, and accelerates student learning opportunities.

We note that "the law" includes an embedded monitoring and evaluation system which, according to respondents, has caused some definitional confusion among HEI actors. In particular, the differences between academic SL/CEL (community engaged activities intentionally tied to a specific academic curriculum) and traditional forms of volunteerism and/or politically supported youth engagement activities, for example, Green Summer initiatives tied to the Vietnamese Youth Union (Nguyen et al., 2023) are not clearly distinguished. Therefore, later in the recommendations section of this paper, we identify the need to construct a recognized "framework" for Vietnamese SL/CEL which has the potential to assist both the government of Vietnam and its HEIs as a reference for improving monitoring and evaluation systems for SL/CEL.

Challenges

Respondents also stated several challenges associated with SL/CEL development, implementation, and sustainability including: 1. confusion due to general lack of familiarity with SL/CEL and differentiated community-campus roles; and 2. general lack of resources to support SL/CEL activity generating unrealistic faculty workload expectations.

1. Confusion on the part of actors regarding multiple aspects associated with the overall SL/CEL process.

One faculty member mentioned,

"We have community activities to support the learning part for students, but it is not clear that the plan would serve or support the community."

Another suggested,

"SL/CEL expertise is so fragile that its performance and sustainability depends on the activities of specific, more experienced and innovative personnel."

Also, there appears to be persistent confusion about basic definitions (including the role of reflection, integration, and service itself). As one respondent put it,

"Our department has 42 teachers but only two understand the definitions and meanings of SL/CEL, all the others think it is a place for students to practice and have experiences only."

Regarding knowledge, awareness, and understanding on the part of community and community partners, there are additional challenges. One faculty respondent shared,

"Most communities and community members we have worked with do not understand SL/CEL and are suspicious about working with universities."

Another suggested,

"We (instructors) don't have experience working with community and that causes so much trouble. Once my students worked in an orphanage and they were shocked and hurt with the way children are treated there. I felt that I needed to stop the SL/CEL project since that time."

Still another faculty member suggested,

"Community members expect too much without understanding that our students' abilities and time on the project are limited.... Community partners sometimes

want to have our students to work for them in a project right away, while we need to arrange the activities in a certain time of school year or have our activities approved by our department and the HEI. That makes agreement difficult."

A testimonial from a community partner underscores the significant communication and other core challenges with SL/CEL in Vietnam today:

"We used to work with volunteers/ students from an HEI but after that we had to stop receiving more students. The students and instructors did not really inform or discuss with us the changes in their plans and we felt we did not have a voice in the partnership."

Finally, one highly insightful SL/CEL faculty participant identified their sense of the lack of core insight on the part of all participants in SL/CEL activities: reciprocity, or the deep awareness that both learning and serving are two-way propositions between HEIs and community entities:

"This lack of experience and expertise (in working with community) obstructs HEI individuals from having mutual respect and learning with and from the community (despite the fact that they also consider community as a source of contribution and resources for SL/CEL practitioners). HEIs need more awareness and learning about working with community and the meaning of co-creating knowledge."

2. Lack of resources to support faculty generating unrealistic faculty workload expectations.

Regarding strategies, actors regularly shared that they think that the environment in Vietnamese HEI is convenient to develop SL/CEL, however, they believe that HEIs should have an overall strategy and administrative department to support SL/CEL, to include the availability of more consistent resources. Indeed, it was clear that much initial SL/CEL initiatives tend to emerge from individual faculty and staff efforts that rely especially on individual instructors' efforts. As one faculty member suggested:

"Our case is quite similar to many HEIs, we are encouraged to try SL/CEL but instructors are left to manage by their own in terms of finding time, funding, and resources for the activities."

Multiple respondents commented on the consistent lack of support and resources available for faculty to learn about and develop this new engaged pedagogy. One interviewee suggested "we know that being engaged is important, however, we have just completed some projects then we had to stop. Our faculty, instructors, and staff were very excited at the beginning, but we need leaders and experts to lead our activities, we need plans, and an overall strategy to develop SL/CEL in our HEI. To have such a position or an office/a department, we need to consult the (Communist) Party and many different departments and not all of them understand the importance." Another respondent clearly stated, "there are no resources from the HEI for administrative support mechanisms, incentives, or funding. Individual instructors who conduct SL/CEL internships or activities have to manage by themselves. They could be able to conduct projects when they have sponsorships, yet without outside funding they cannot continue. That's why SL/CEL activities in our HEI are not permanent although the need from community is huge." Finally, underscoring the particular challenge for state-supported HEIs in Vietnam regarding SL/CEL adoption, one respondent shared:

"We understand the values of SL/CEL for students' study and research, as well as the need to keep up with trend of developing

SL/CEL in HEIs at the moment, but we have some key disadvantages in operating these activities. While non-state HEIs, with more autonomy in finance and administration, have successfully founded support centers for SL/CEL - or at least persons in charge of supporting faculties in doing this - for state HEIs like us, we don't not have dedicated budget or personnel for SL/CEL. Therefore, if we want to do SL/CEL, we have to use personnel from other tasks (Youth Union, Students Affairs staff, etc.) to carry out the administrative work for SL/CEL (if any), and that's not effective or sustainable. That is the main reason why, for state HEIs, SL/CEL mostly relies on individual efforts rather than the institutional commitment."

Additionally, many respondents underscored they they mobilize resources a variety of additional sources, including:

- international cooperation for research on SL/CEL in Vietnam;
- working with local government and public entities;
- leveraging the presence of corporate philanthropy in Vietnam;
- better engaging with localized resource networks such as VNES for capacity building and HEI change support;
- utilizing international funding agencies and networks (e.g., IrishAID, USAID, Campus Compact, and others) to support networking opportunities and to build more stabilized funding in support of SL/CEL.

Discussion: Motivations and Challenges

Motivations

Clearly there are multiple, positive motivations for faculty and others to participate in community-engaged activities and other aspects of building community-university partnerships. As the data attest, principle among these motivations is a movement influenced and driven strongly by social norms and a sense of social responsibility. The responses focusing on "doing good things," and "righteousness," etc. are backed by long-aged and deeply held Vietnamese / Asian society values.

While "the law," as we have outlined, has provided rationale for HEIs to create and support SL/CEL initiatives, our findings confirm those in the literature that much of the motivation for the deepening and sustaining of these community-engaged pedagogical and research practices has largely emerged "bottom-up," from HEI and community practitioners (Nguyen et al., 2023). The lack of a strong top-down, political-administrative support system generally tends to produce a resource scarce environment, making new initiatives hard to support and difficult to implement. Yet, despite the lack of significant state funding support, SL/CEL practices in Vietnamese HEIs continue to grow. Therefore, as suggested by respondents, faculty are independently motivated by the prospect of engaging their students, and themselves, with community members for the purposes of advancing community-driven, public causes. This perspective and associated community-focused activities and commitments are likely in part influenced by the philosophy of Confucianism which is popular in many Asian countries, particularly in rural areas, including in Vietnam. For instance, two of the five main values of Confucianism are: "righteousness" and "benevolence, humaneness towards others." Vietnam has been influenced deeply by this philosophy for over two thousand years.

Verhelst and Tyndale (2002) claim that no program can bring positive and lasting results unless it is anchored in the cultural norms and values of the society in question. Also, Uphoff (2000) has pointed out that "initiatives that did not take account of the human dimensions of development, including such factors as values, norms, culture, motivation, and solidarity, would be less successful than expected and intended" (p. 215). Therefore, we can

see that the positive influence of this motivation helps SL/CEL develop strongly and sustainably in HEIs.

A second major factor influencing the development and emerging institutionalisation of SL/CEL in Vietnamese HEIs on national scale are the new higher education laws and subsequent revisions (MOET 2012, 2016, 2018 & 2019). The frequency with which respondents mention the "law" in interviews suggests its powerful sway over practice. The new laws require community engagement for HEIs which is a powerful motivating force. Traditionally in Vietnam, curriculum was established in a top-down format, however, since 2012, there has been an opening for HEIs to establish more "autonomy" in their curricular practices. Further, one main mechanism that academic leaders in Vietnam now use to address the mandate to create curriculum that is "new, modern, global…" is SL/CEL. In fact, one of the strategies that the recently established non-state HEIs are using to compete with state-supported HEIs for students is the accelerated and advanced development of SL/CEL practices. If "doing good things for community" is a primary motivation for faculty, the "international and modern" values of SL/CEL are some of the main motivating factors for HEI leaders. Those terms, along with "whole person education," "transferable skills," and "international citizenship" were frequently mentioned when respondents explained why they support the application of SL/CEL in the rapidly changing identity of their HEI's development.

Finally, few if any of these foundational changes would naturally occur unless there were present some modest acceptance of new management strategies at the institutional level; moving from more of a command and control-like perspective to one that facilitates creative innovations from the bottom-up, directly springing from those participants closest to actualizing these activities. Several respondents noted the flexibility in management of non-state HEIs as a facilitator for accelerated educational quality change and development. Developing and applying SL/CEL practices has been especially prevalent in curricular innovation at non-state HEIs. The potential for bottom-up policy making in Vietnamese HEIs is producing change that is now more frequently being generated at the institutional level from students and faculty rather than only or mostly from a top-down centralized state generated strategy. One long-time SL/CEL practitioner mentioned "for state HEIs like us, we do not have dedicated budget or personnel for SL/CEL. Therefore, if we want to do SL/CEL, we have to use personnel from other tasks (Youth Union, Students Affairs staff, etc.) to carry out the administrative work for SL/CEL (if any), and that's not effective or sustainable. That is the main reason

why, for state HEIs, SL/CEL mostly relies on individual efforts rather than the institutional commitment." These general sentiments from respondents suggest that state HEIs may need to innovate new management procedures to compete with non-state HEIs for students today and in the future. In summary, the recent higher education laws are creating new openings in Vietnam's HEIs and are quickly transforming curricular practices and especially accelerating the establishment and institutionalisation of SL/CEL.

Challenges

Qualitative and quantitative responses from research participants suggests that current challenges to SL/CEL development and institutionalisation tend to cohere to two main factors: 1) lack of familiarity and knowledge about many aspects of the pedagogical practice; and, 2) shortage of resources to support the practice.

Respondents' stated lack of familiarity and knowledge of SL/CEL practices manifested in two principal ways. *Instrumentally*, respondents regularly signaled prevalent confusion about basic definitions and delivery mechanisms associated with CEL, including general lack of understanding about terms, processes, implementation strategies, and expectations. *Constitutively*, challenges associated with working with community members in the context of reciprocal community-university partnership development for SL/CEL and community-based research were prevalent.

The instrumental challenges evident in the data are largely predictable and generally follow a pattern of modest confusion when new pedagogical techniques are introduced into practice. This pattern of initial lack of clarity about terms and practices predicably occurred in North American and European HEIs at the advent of SL/CEL emergence in those continents over the past quarter-century. Similarly, confusion about the definition and roles of "community" in myriad SL/CEL processes was also prevalent in the era of early development, and remains, in countries with longer histories of SL/CEL institutionalisation. The former, instrumental, challenges can be fairly quickly addressed with additional and better facilitated practice exposure and training. The latter, constitutive challenge, however, are more deeply embedded in culture and patterned behavior and are potentially more confounding to all parties involved in SL/CEL endeavors.

The data suggest that practitioners associated with HEIs tend to consider "community" and "community members" in a socially lower position than themselves. This often manifests in the attitude of assuming that faculty and student roles are to be focused on "helping" and "giving to" community, rather than to also learning from and with them. This Vietnamese cultural norm, on one hand, represents a spirit of contribution ("doing good things") and, as previously discussed, is a strong motivation for faculty to participate in SL/CEL. Yet, survey and interview responses clearly suggest that this perception also causes confusion about the overall purpose(s) of SL/CEL. Specifically, this cultural norm or perception may obstruct faculty and students' abilities to approach community with mutual respect and in a spirit of reciprocity. Two clear ramifications of this tendency appear in the data:

1) A lack of ability to maximize "learning" that can occur when different sources of community wisdom, knowledge, and experience are integrated into the overall pedagogical process; and

2) Dissatisfaction with the SL/CEL process can emerge on the part of community members. Community-based respondents signaled this disgruntlement with HEI during interviews. In one case, a community member positively acknowledged the assistance they had received from university faculty and students, however, they complained and signaled their dissatisfaction and ultimately chose to discontinue with the project because they felt they were not sufficiently consulted or involved in the planning and decision-making processes associated with the SL/CEL project. However, responses to the online

survey demonstrate that a significant percentage of respondents consider community as a source of resources for SL/CEL. Therefore, it appears that more facilitated discussion and capacity building activities about how to build and sustain community-campus partnerships, as well as the ideology of sharing and co-creating knowledge between higher education and community entities in Vietnam, is needed and has potential to be effective.

Lack of funding and other resource availability to support emergent pedagogical and research techniques in HEI is not a new topic. This concern has emerged with respect to SL/CEL development and institutionalisation for several decades on a global scale. Therefore, it is not surprising that Vietnamese HEI respondents signal a similar concern. One aspect, also not uncommon, that appears in the data with relatively high frequency is the concern that this lack of understanding about the time-consuming nature of SL/CEL processes and associated shortage of supportive resources tends to create unrealistic and overly burdensome faculty workload expectations. While this is troublesome and has the very real potential to slow down or even derail many promising SL/CEL initiatives, it is not surprising given the nascent emergence of SL/CEL practices in Vietnam.

Limitations and Areas of Future Research and Action

There are many limitations to this research which future researchers will have an opportunity to address. Core limitations include the lack of using a random sampling strategy that includes a greater representation of all HEI participants in Vietnam; limited access to both HEI and community participants; a lack of universal understanding of the role and purpose of this research; lack of involvement of students in this research study; and, time and other resource constraints to undertake this time-intensive research endeavor, among other limitations.

Areas for future research

In a country and part of the globe where SL/CEL is in a nascent, emergent phase, there is great need for additional research. While this present research sets a benchmark of understanding of the practice of SL/CEL in Vietnam today, it also suggests several additional areas for exploration that are needed. A few broad areas for future research include:

- Exploring the definition of "community" in Vietnam. Given the social-political reality of this socialist state, defining community – including its roles in society, its areas of strengths, challenges, wisdom and knowledge generation and sharing, etc. – will be helpful in the development of a unique approach to community engagement in Vietnam specifically, and in the South East Asia context generally;
- How to build (a) framework(s) for SL/CEL by integrating the Law of Higher Education and its aligned regulations/benchmarks in Vietnam;
- Assets-based assessment/research for development SL/CEL in HEI in Vietnam;
- Procedures of SL/CEL curriculum designing/building in HEI in Vietnam;
- Best practices and models of SL/CEL in Vietnam;
- Community-campus partnership development strategies, successes, and challenges in Vietnam;
- Institutionalisation of SL/CEL in Vietnam;
- SL/CEL and professional development/leadership/qualification of workforce in Vietnam;
- Exploring the differentiation of SL/CEL development and institutionalisation in non-state HEI vs. state-supported HEIs in Vietnam.

Recommendations for future action

Partnership building:

Supporting universities and community organizations and members in the process of reciprocal community-university partnership building. HEI and community members will profit from capacity building in the processes of transforming all participants to view themselves as equal partners and co-educators in the SL/CEL endeavor. We recognize and support the perspective that partnership building is not just simply the introduction of a university member to a community organization. Rather, we recommend applying an egalitarian companionship model while developing engagement and learning procedures based on ground rules of the participation of both sides at every step of the process. This reciprocal activity should appreciate the extant and latent assets available within both HEIs and in community partners' organizations. This activity should work to understand and respect the values of both communities and universities and develop mechanisms for co-learning and co-empowering all parties involved. It will also be helpful to build community-university portals/hubs that highlight assets and needs of all partners for the purposes of developing meaningful and impactful SL/CEL opportunities. Eventually, developing easily accessible mechanisms to connect engaged universities and communities with each other to learn about, assess, and take thoughtful actions on these opportunities will increase activity, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Infrastructure and Capacity Building:

Capacity building is clearly needed for the development of both SL/CEL as well as community-based research (CBR) activities. There are many mechanisms to facilitate the building of participants' capacity including: providing regular assistance in curricular design, implementation, and reflection for SL/CEL courses; providing project management assistance for community-engaged faculty; and, building senior community and university leaders' understanding and commitment to community-engaged activities. Capacity building could be effectively accomplished through a process of "learning-by-doing," with a focus on actual projects, actions, partnership building, course designing endeavors, project implementation, and conducting CBR. Workshops and various training and mentoring opportunities should focus on specific skills related to current engaged scholarly and curricular activity, including: integrating reflection into curricular and project design; exploring ethical issues; increasing evaluation capacity; the use of rubrics; and, augmenting project management expertise. Ideally, senior leaders from academic departments or other heads of departments should be involved in these processes to ensure that the university becomes more unified in its understanding and support of institutionalizing SL/CEL innovations. Next, in order to support CBR, the creation of research hubs and supporting environments for engaged scholars and students to share skills, methodologies, and interests for conducting CBR are very important to encourage scholars' involvement in engaged research. Also, we note that there is a need for faculty to have increasing capacity for qualitative and quantitative research methodology, participatory methods, and social science research. This could be supported by the creation of research councils and networks of community and university "experts" in different domains working together to ensure that CBR addresses the most salient community-connected concerns. Finally, to support the full suite of these core community engagement strategies and actions, we note that several respondents mentioned the need for some type of institution-based support center and/or dedicated staff.

Benchmark Development:

To augment understanding and increase legitimacy for SL/CEL activities at the institutional and national level, sustained work should be undertaken to establish benchmarks that would lead to additional educational advocacy for SL/CEL in the future. Concerning macro educational management, Vietnamese leaders could profit from supporting the development of a national framework,

models, and procedures that could be used as a basis for making policies for SL/CEL and CBR in higher education and for all stages of the education system. Researchers, networks, community members, coalitions of SL/CEL scholars, students, and others should be encouraged to participate in this process.

Coalition Building:

Establishing and supporting coalitions and networks of engaged scholars, students, and community members as well as parallel networks for engaged universities would support the sharing of promising models and connection hubs for SL/CEL researchers, best practice sharing, and advocacy for academic SL/CEL. The Vietnam Network of Engaged Scholars (VNES) which was founded by Vietnam Campus Engage (VCE) in 2020, is a pioneering network and includes more than 500 scholars from more than 100 HEIs in Vietnam. Building on this early, promising coalition-building work should be encouraged and supported.

Independent Scholarship:

Supporting independent scholars and students should be encouraged and rewarded given that independent initiatives promulgated by this cohort of scholars has the potential to challenge the prevailing educational and research systems and accelerate the pace of change toward institutionalisation of community-engaged activities.

Student Support:

Students need capacity building for engaged learning and research. Students could participate in research for their academic assignments as well as conduct independent, engaged research. Students are often quite passionate and creative when given opportunities, skills, and supports needed to ensure success. Preparing students properly is important for some of the more transformational aspects of SL/CEL to emerge, including: better understanding of assessment strategies; participating in orientations; preparation; and other types of training for students before engaging with communities in the process of SL/CEL. Finally, providing students opportunities to be exposed to different communities, with diverse students from other universities, countries, and cultures will deepen and extend global awareness, commitment to environmental stewardship, ability to facilitate dialogue, critical thinking skills, and civic engagement practices.

Funding:

There is a clear need for seed and other types of funding to encourage a new culture of partnership development to include charity from philanthropists and corporate social responsibility entities to nurture civic engagement. Currently, financial gifts from individuals and corporate charities in Vietnam tend to be prioritized for the current and most basic needs of vulnerable people. To help spur the future development of a new culture of giving and engagement in Vietnam – one that is increasingly more sustainable and effective – funding for SL/CEL and civic engagement in general could accelerate a transformation in charitable giving and activity in Vietnam

International Cooperation:

Fomenting international cooperation has proven to be an effective channel for adapting SL/CEL. This is especially so since many Vietnamese HEIs are interested in augmenting their quality of education to rival those HEIs at an international level. Some examples of international cooperation might include capacity building workshops, conferences, collaborative SL/CEL projects and research with international faculty, instructors, students, and international higher education and community institutions.

Conclusion

The major findings of our research establish a rough baseline of experience, understanding, motivations, and current challenges to implementing SL/CEL and community-engaged research in Vietnamese HEIs. SL/CEL in HEIs in Vietnam is currently experiencing significant growth and has potential to continue to successfully develop similar to many countries and territories in the Asia-Pacific region such as Hong

Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia, especially given the clear ambition and motivations from multiple sectors. Combining a) strategic capacity building efforts, with b) government-level reform to augment its current SL/CEL monitoring and evaluation system, with c) augmented, targeted resource allocation on a national scale to support SL/CEL would likely sustain and perhaps accelerate this impressive HEI community-engagement growth. This research helps clarify and augment Vietnam-based institutional and faculty development specialists' knowledge regarding the current state of SL/CEL practices in this country. This treatment also suggests several areas for future research for the development of Vietnamese community-university partnership development as well as provides specific actions that might facilitate and accelerate the adoption of these powerful community-engaged practices. More broadly, this research adds to the theory and practice of introducing, implementing, and sustaining community engagement practices in socialist-oriented, national political environments.

Huong Tran, MA

Founder and Executive Director
Vietnam Campus Engage /
Vietnamese Network of Engaged Scholars

Huong Tran received her master's degree in International Development and Social Change and has had more than 20 years experience working as a community development practitioner in Vietnam.

She is a pioneering leader in Service-Learning and Community-Engaged Learning in Vietnam and the founder of the VNES (Vietnam Network of Engaged Scholars) which includes more than 500 scholars from more than 120 higher education institutions in Vietnam.

Kevin Kecskes, PhD

Department Chair and Professor,
Public Administration
College of Urban and Public Affairs
/ Hatfield School of Government
Portland State University

Kevin Kecskes, PhD is Professor & Department Chair of Public Administration at Portland State University (PSU). He teaches on civic & global leadership and ethics. Kevin also served for a decade as Associate Vice Provost for Engagement and Director for Community-University Partnerships. From 1997-2002, he was Regional Program Director for the Western Region Campus Compact Consortium. He has been involved in the higher education civic engagement movement for over 25 years.

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