

Community Engagement of Adventist Higher Educational Institutions: A Case Study

Summary

Higher educational institutions (HEIs) have a role to engage themselves in “a sustainable partnership . . . [with] communities” (Jacob, Weidman, & Yeager, 2005). Along with teaching and research, community service is a core function of HEIs. Anchored on the biblical mandate to serve those in need and on boundary spanning theory, this case study looked into the community engagement practices of Adventist higher educational institutions (AHEIs), their challenges and how they resolved them, and what model for a successful implementation of a community extension service (CES) program could be proposed. Six AHEIs in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division participated in the study. The participants were chosen through purposive sampling. Main sources of data were in-depth interviews with the presidents, the CES director, the CES coordinator and focus group discussions with faculty and students. Other sources of data were observation notes, analytic memos, and documents. Data were analyzed through open and axial coding. Data revealed the following findings: (a) community engagement practices of AHEIs included instituting an organizational structure for CES; adopting depressed barangays based on needs, safety, and accessibility; committing to sustained engagement; providing funding; doing assessment, monitoring, and evaluation; and working closely with all stakeholders; (b) the challenges that AHEIs faced were time issues, lack of support, lack of documentation, lack of student participation in decision-making, and resistance of target communities; (c) AHEIs used the following measures—

active involvement of administrators, faculty, and students; long-term planning; thorough implementation of programs/projects; empowering the community; (d) action plans for a successful implementation of a CES program—establishing strong philosophical foundations; creation of a CES office; assigning a CES director for the AHEI, CES coordinator for each department, a CES committee; allocating funding; developing a CES manual, and rendering service in the spirit of caring and commitment, among others. To ensure high effectivity of CES programs, the following recommendations were drawn for AHEIs: use the integrated approach toward the implementation of the HEI's three core functions by adapting service learning as a course component and requirement for graduation, assign qualified and competent CES directors and coordinators, conduct evaluation of effectiveness of CES programs, and introduce creative CES programs that address more than the basic needs of the community that will result to empowerment.

Keywords: community engagement, community extension services, Adventist higher educational institutions, Southern Asia-Pacific Division, case study

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