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More than any other segment of American higher education, community colleges play a unique role in their own communities. The AACC is sponsoring several community-building and service learning projects at community college campuses across the nation.

Service Learning: Why Community Colleges?

Lynn Barnett

Community colleges have been at the forefront of the "community-building" movement for a decade. Their mission statements call for them to be community-based organizations, to meet community needs, to provide service to the community. They are, after all, of, by, and for the communities in which they dwell. Today they are being recognized in the service learning field for combining what they do best—teaching, serving, and modeling civic responsibility. More than any other segment of American higher education, community colleges play a unique role in their own communities.

A big push for this agenda occurred in 1986. Responding to four decades of tremendous growth in community colleges at a time of striking demographic changes in the United States, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC)—the national organization that represents the nation's 1,100 technical, junior, and community colleges—determined that it was time to take stock of the community college movement and develop recommendations to help community colleges move into the twenty-first century with wisdom and vitality. The AACC's board of directors appointed nineteen distinguished Americans to the Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, headed by honorary chair Senator Nancy Kassebaum and working chair Ernest Boyer, chairman of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. After eighteen months of study, public hearings, and campus visits, in 1988 the commission released its report, *Building Communities: A Vision for a New Century*. It strongly recommended that "the theme 'Building Communities' become the new rallying point for the community college in America" (Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, 1988, p.11). This theme was to guide the AACC's work for some time to come.

The commission made a point of defining "community." Community was more than a geographic region; it was "a climate to be created," inside and outside the college (Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, 1988, p.11). It recognized the value of diversity and the value of service. One of the report's main recommendations was to establish and maintain strong connections beyond the college. The commission urged "that all community colleges encourage a service program at their institution, one that begins with clearly stated educational objectives," and "that students participating in service programs be asked to write about their experience and to explore with a mentor and fellow students how it is related to what they have been studying in the classroom" (Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, 1988, p.12).

The AACC's president has echoed the sentiments of the commission regarding community-building and service. Supporting community-based programming, he has cited the value of collaborative learning with its high academic standards and spirit of community: "Community colleges are perfectly positioned to be focal points for community-based programs because of their long history of service to populations who have been underserved or poorly served by social programs in the past. . . . Community colleges offer an ideal perspective from which to identify the need for community-based programs and to bring together the individuals, agencies, and organizations that need to be involved in creating them" (Pierce and Green, 1992, p.26, p.27). Further, AACC leadership has challenged its members: "Community colleges, real community colleges, should occupy a special place in their community. . . . They must go beyond . . . especially to developing and building healthy communities . . ." (Pierce, 1993, pp.3-4).

These actions by the AACC coincided with a growing movement that espoused the need for community-building and citizen participation (Barber and Battistoni, 1993; Coles, 1993; Etzioni, 1993; Putnam, 1995; Roueche, Taber, and Roueche, 1995), and with research studies on service learning in higher education (Dutton, 1993; Martin, 1994; Shapiro, 1990; Smith, 1993).

The Community College Community

Representing the largest segment of American higher education, the community college network has the potential for making a major impact on the implementation of service learning across the country. The network comprises 1,100 colleges, with at least one in every congressional district. In the last census of the colleges, nearly six million credit students were enrolled in programs that included general education transfer curricula, technical programs, and specialized training programs often arranged in partnership with local business and industry and with public agencies. In addition, there were more than 5.5 million students enrolled in noncredit offerings, ranging from personal development programs, to English as a Second Language and remediation courses, to high-tech instruction tailored to upgrade specific skills to meet industry needs. Enrollment projections suggest continued increases in the foreseeable future.

The community college student body lends itself to the active nature of the service learning pedagogy. Forty-four percent of students are thirty years or older; most students are employed, 37 percent are part-time and another 29 percent are full-time. Most live in the region served by the college. About 27 percent of the community college student population is minority, a far higher percentage than is reported by other types of postsecondary institutions. More than fifty-eight thousand international students also are enrolled in community colleges. According to 1992 figures, more than half of all postsecondary students with a reported disability attended a community college (Phillippe, 1995). Community colleges are the colleges of choice not only for nontraditional and "second-chance" students seeking associate degrees and specialized training but also for traditional students preparing to transfer to baccalaureate programs. Others return to the community college after attending four-year institutions.

One of the important conclusions to be drawn from this data is that any program targeted to community college students is likely to affect other significant audiences: the workplace, families, and other community groups in which the students participate. Students are local, with strong personal ties to community businesses, organizations, and other residents. They bring what they learn home and to work. The influence of what they learn affects their behavior in their communities. As community stakeholders, community colleges are key players in tackling local problems. In short, community colleges are a natural fit for service learning.

The programs described below feature community-building and service learning; many others concentrated on work force development and other issues.

National Demonstration Programs

As more and more people recognized the mission and capacity of community colleges to contribute to the well-being of their communities, a variety of organizations—philanthropic and government agencies dedicated to the same principles—began to show serious interest in the colleges. With a voice of confidence in the national community college movement, many of these organizations funded three new national AACC initiatives.

AACC/Kellogg Foundation Beacon College Project. During the decade since the Commission on the Future of Community Colleges began its work, the AACC made the notion of community-building a theme for much of its activities and programs. The six-year Beacon College Project was a direct outgrowth of the *Building Communities* report. Generously funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the project took to heart the commission's challenge to develop programs and services that would build communities. The Beacon College concept required a lead or "beacon" college to form a consortium with at least five associate colleges and then to replicate or implement collectively an exemplary program or service related to recommendations in *Building Communities*. The intent was to use a consortium approach to carry out activities

that address the issues identified in the Futures Commission's report to affect communities across the country. The issues were as follows: partnerships for learning, the curriculum from literacy to lifelong learning, the classroom as community, the college as community, connections beyond the college, and leadership for a new century.

A total of twenty-six colleges were awarded two-year grants as Beacon Colleges, selected in national competitions beginning in 1992. Through their outreach, as of spring 1994 the AACC/Kellogg Foundation Beacon College Project had reached more than six hundred institutions and 130,000 individuals. It leveraged more than \$5.6 million from other sources. Across the nation, the word "beacon" came to refer to any number of local community-building programs, from student tutoring or student scholar conferences to service learning and civic responsibility (Barnett, 1992).

The Beacon College Project had a significant impact on the conceptualization of later national initiatives, particularly in its emphasis on community-building and collaborative approaches to problem solving. More specifically, the Beacon project at the Community College of Aurora (CCA), "Ethics-Across-the-Curriculum and Civic Responsibility," was the forerunner of the AACC's current service learning initiative. Working with six other community colleges as well as Colorado Campus Compact, CCA implemented a program that included workshops, mentoring teams, and an international conference on faculty development.

AACC Service Learning Colleges Project. In August 1994 the AACC received one of sixty-five grants awarded by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) as part of the Learn and Serve America program. There were 425 applicants in the nationwide competition.

The AACC's project, "Service Learning and Community Colleges: Building a National Network," got off the ground with additional support from the Kellogg Foundation, the sponsor of the Beacon College Project. The aim of the service learning grant is to strengthen the service learning infrastructure within and across community colleges and to help train faculty in skills needed to implement service learning strategies, including reflection activities. The grant has three components: national data collection, service learning demonstration grants, and technical assistance. The Campus Compact Center for Community Colleges in Arizona is a partner in the project.

Data collection. A recent national survey (Robinson, 1995b) solicited current information from all community colleges across the country to identify programs and resources for service learning. Project staff developed a data base of information collected from more than seven hundred community colleges. Survey results indicate that 75 percent of all community colleges either already are offering some kind of service learning opportunities to their students or are interested in beginning; a full 30 percent reported now offering service learning in a variety of courses. Nearly half of all colleges reported having an office or group that places students in community service opportunities, but only one in five promotes collegewide service programs. Only fifteen colleges reported requiring

students to perform community service to graduate; a growing number, however, include participation in service learning on student transcripts. Most service learning programs are quite new, with 75 percent having started since 1990.

The survey also yielded more specific information about individual colleges. Thirty-seven percent of community colleges with service learning offer specific, stand-alone courses in community service. Social sciences and humanities courses are more likely to include a service learning component, and most institutions rely on a relatively small number of faculty to implement service learning. Student journals (see Canham, Mason, and Hesse, 1995, for examples) and class discussion appear to be the favorite mechanisms for reflection. Individual faculty members or an administrator with responsibilities for student services are the likely leaders for service learning on a campus.

The four most significant factors in the success of service learning were reported to be, in order, faculty support, administrative support, community support, and student commitment. It is of interest that start-up funding was rated seventh in a list of success factors, above technical assistance, resource materials, and "other." By far, the most frequently cited impediments to implementing service learning activities were insufficient funding (apparently contradicting responses that rated "start-up funding" as only moderately important for success) and insufficient release time. Not unexpectedly, many respondents reported a willingness to share information about their own programs (Robinson and Barnett, in press).

Grants. After a national request-for-proposals competition, a review panel selected eight colleges in December 1994 as the new AACC Service Learning Colleges, each receiving a \$12,000 grant for the first year of an expected three-year program. Each college was encouraged to innovate and to adapt their approaches to the special needs of their communities. The grantees submitted action plans to implement programs that address community needs in the areas of education, public safety, human needs, and environmental needs—the areas specified by the CNCS (Robinson, 1995a). The colleges are as follows:

Alpena Community College, Alpena, Michigan. This project provides tutorial assistance to elementary and secondary school students and assists retirement-age citizens.

Flathead Valley Community College, Kalispell, Montana. FVCC has focused its service learning grant activities on a single environmental area: solid waste management and water quality. Its Waste Not Project features strong community agency participation as well as faculty, administrator, and student support.

Hocking Technical College, Nelsonville, Ohio. Hocking is establishing a service learning center and data bank on community needs, and has implemented a faculty orientation program that includes a day of service by faculty.

Johnson County Community College, Overland Park, Kansas. In a wide-ranging effort, JCCC students are providing service to the elderly and to at-risk youth, educating the public on recycling and conservation, and acting as companions for mentally ill individuals.

Kapi'olani Community College, Honolulu, Hawaii. Reflecting its diverse community and student body, KCC emphasizes multiculturalism in its service and learning. Faculty in a variety of disciplines are creating a set of fifteen integrated course offerings with strong service learning components.

Monroe Community College, Rochester, New York. In a unique partnership with the city police department, and with strong support from Blue Cross/Blue Shield in the corporate sector, college students and community residents are engaged in community policing. MCC has benefited from the expertise of a faculty member who is a twenty-year veteran of the police force. The college is looking at ways to expand the service learning experience beyond its criminal justice program.

Prestonsburg Community College, Prestonsburg, Kentucky. Set in rural Appalachia, Prestonsburg is capitalizing on both the strong commitment to and rich opportunities for service in the area. Workshops and training programs with local agencies help strengthen partnerships and highlight placement opportunities, but students often rely on their own intimate knowledge of the community to identify sites for their service.

Truman College, Chicago, Illinois. An inner-city college in the Uptown area of Chicago, Truman has both a highly diverse student population, with students from all over the world, and significant needs within its own walls. The college houses Truman Middle College, an alternative high school for dropouts that is an ideal site for tutoring, mentoring, and other service activities. The service learning leadership team is led by a counselor and includes the chairs of the math, biology, and sociology departments. Community policing and environmental restoration of Illinois' plains areas were the first areas of community service.

All of the colleges are strengthening their local organizational structures, faculty training in reflection activities, and community partnerships to enhance civic responsibility. In the first six months of their grants, the AACC Service Learning Colleges engaged more than seven hundred individuals in service learning, all the while working to get systems in place that would assure program continuance beyond the grant period. Several participant reflection essays suggest the impact of the project after its first year (Brooks, 1995; DiCrocce, 1995; Ottenritter, 1995a, 1995b).

With the support of the Kellogg Foundation in the second year of the AACC project, small technical assistance grants were awarded to three additional colleges that fell into institutional categories not previously represented (tribal, Hispanic-serving, and multicampus college). They are Navajo Community College, Tsaile, Arizona; Albuquerque Technical-Vocational Institute, Albuquerque, New Mexico; and Northern Virginia Community College-Manassas, Manassas, Virginia. Regional workshops were part of the second-year plan for the original eight AACC Service Learning Colleges as a way to help faculty at other community colleges implement service learning.

Technical Assistance. This aspect of the project includes a six-person mentor team, start-up and evaluation project meetings with all project participants, the AACC Service Learning Clearinghouse, and a special project listserv on the Internet. (Listserves are automated programs that serve as distribution centers for electronic mail messages.)

The members of the AACC Service Learning Mentor Team, who bring expertise from both academic and student services perspectives, come from the following colleges: Chandler-Gilbert Community College, Chandler, Arizona; Community College of Aurora, Aurora, Colorado; Hagerstown Junior College, Hagerstown, Maryland; Miami-Dade Community College-Medical Center, Miami, Florida; and Piedmont Virginia Community College, Charlottesville, Virginia. Four of the mentors were involved in the Ethics-Across-the-Curriculum Beacon project, which featured service learning and civic responsibility.

The richness of knowledge and skills among the mentor team members contributed significantly to successful start-up activities in the eight AACC Service Learning Colleges. Although each college was assigned a specific mentor to help with action plans and implementation strategies, the mentor team lent its collective expertise to all the colleges and helped the national staff assess the progress of the project overall and at each institution. Miami-Dade, for example, has developed impressive evaluation instruments that can help ensure the academic integrity of service learning programs (Exley, Young, Johnson, and Johnson, 1995). Site visits and regular reporting are key elements as the project continues. The dedicated Internet listserv has facilitated timely communication among project directors, staff, and mentors. The Service Learning Clearinghouse operates as a resource not only for campus project directors and mentors but also for faculty, administrators, and others interested in service learning implementation at community colleges.

Bridges to Healthy Communities Project. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in September 1995 entered into a cooperative agreement with the AACC to implement a five-year project called "Bridges to Healthy Communities." With appreciation of the power of community colleges to deliver services, the CDC is supporting a service learning project that will focus on the prevention of HIV infection and other serious health problems. Current research suggests that information alone does not appear to be sufficient for promoting or sustaining behavioral changes, and that intervention programs that bring together campus and community may have better results. The service learning approach will foster partnerships between the colleges and their communities, providing students with learning opportunities in the area of health education while also engaging the faculty and others at the college and meeting community needs. Service learning in this case will touch not only individuals but also their environment.

The Bridges project ultimately will involve between two hundred to four hundred community colleges in a Beacon-type approach to program development. Ten demonstration colleges identified in the first year will bring additional colleges into the project in subsequent years. Some of the AACC Service

Learning Colleges in the current Learn and Serve America project will provide technical assistance as the Bridges project gears up.

National Resources Targeted Toward Community Colleges

The Campus Compact Center for Community Colleges and the AACC Service Learning Clearinghouse are two organizations that offer funding to community colleges for service learning projects and provide information, as well as sample materials, on service learning in community colleges. A brief overview of these two organizations is provided.

Campus Compact Center for Community Colleges (CCCCC). This center, devoted solely to community colleges, is a source of information on service learning, and offers funding to community colleges that are members of Campus Compact. Its annual national conference draws more than two hundred community college professionals, including significant numbers of faculty. Located in Mesa, Arizona, CCCCC is supported by the Campus Compact national office in Providence, Rhode Island, the Maricopa Community Colleges System, and Mesa College.

AACC Service Learning Clearinghouse. Established as part of the Learn and Serve America grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service, the AACC's clearinghouse contains information collected in the 1995 national survey on service learning in community colleges, as well as resource lists and sample materials from various service learning practitioners. The clearinghouse can point users to sources of funding or program information, including that from community colleges that have had service learning programs in place for some time, such as Brevard Community College in Florida.

Conclusion

Community colleges are important leaders in the burgeoning service learning movement, and rightly so. The objective of service learning—to integrate service with academic instruction while emphasizing critical reflection and civic responsibility—is a genuine match with the mission of community colleges as teaching and community-serving institutions. Service learning is effective teaching; it is community-building. It is about collaboration and partnerships with community members. Community colleges, which are crucial to the well-being of American communities, can strengthen their ability to serve those communities by implementing service learning programs on their campuses. The American Association of Community Colleges recognizes service learning as a powerful approach to community building. The impact can be limitless.

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