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Irene Fisher
University of Utah

Linda Bonar
University of Utah

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The Service- Learning Scholars Program at the Lowell Bennion Community Service Center

*by Irene Fisher
and Linda Bonar*

NSLC
c/o ETR Associates
4 Carbonero Way
Scotts Valley, CA 95066

THE CREATION of the Service-Learning Scholars Program (SLSP) represents the culmination of five years of experiential learning in the University of Utah's Lowell Bennion Community Service Center. The initiation of this program also signals the beginning of the second major growth stage in the integration of community service into the mainstream of this major state university.

When the University of Utah created the Bennion Center in 1987, it was organized as part of Student Affairs and Services. This organizational placement reflects the original thinking of proponents of campus community service that service programs would be a worthwhile extracurricular involvement for students, with a potential to provide help to the community and perhaps even good public relations for the institution.

In the intervening five years we have given much to the community and we have learned more.

We doubled or tripled the number of university volunteers in service each year. And we helped people in the community — the elderly, at-risk children, the homeless, the hungry, those recovering from alcohol or drug abuse, rural Navajos, refugees, and others.

And we observed for ourselves what members of NSEE have known for a long time — that service warrants a much stronger and more central role in the educational mission of the institution. We observed the powerful nature of the learning opportunities that students encounter as they befriend a refugee, an elderly person, or a child in a family that is homeless. Again and again we heard students say they learned more in the community than in their regular course work.

We acted on that message to help students maximize the learning available from these experiences within our own programs. We integrated a reflective component into our one-time and ongoing service projects. We watched students become a "community of learners" and reflect together on the nature of their experiences, the impact of these experiences on their personal values, and the implications of their experience for broader social issues. We saw a few students begin to keep personal service journals. We watched others seek classes that were tied to their service. In 1991, we published our first annual reflection magazine.

But we could see that we had only begun to utilize the "text of the community" for learning.

In 1991-92, a Bennion Center volunteer and successful candidate for student body president began to implement a campaign pledge: to find a way to connect the highly successful campus community service program and the academic curriculum. Immediately after his election, a committee of three students from the Associated Students of the University of Utah and the Lowell Bennion Community Service Center developed a draft proposal for what was then called a "Service Distinction at Graduation." Using a consultative and opinion-gathering approach, this three-student team began a carefully planned and meticulously executed process to secure institutional approval for their idea. They sought comments from all key campus administrators, student groups, and faculty committees. The students listened carefully for good ideas and integrated them into the draft proposal, gradually building support while refining and strengthening the proposal.

In January, 1992, in what was an unbelievably short time for such a major proposal to move through the approval process, the Academic Senate voted, with one negative vote, to endorse the ongoing program. The Board of Trustees enthusiastically finalized the approval process the same month.

Four factors contributed to the expeditious approval of the program: the students' consultative, consensus-building approach; their persistency and consistency; the Undergraduate Dean's commitment to oversee the academic aspects of the program; and an almost miraculous absence of territoriality, stalling or blocking from any of the 60+ key individuals or eight university committees who reviewed it. Faced with the students' determination to secure approval before their graduation, the executive committee of the Academic Senate even agreed to forego their usual procedures of

notifying members of an issue one month and voting the next.

The transition from approval of the program to implementation was brief. Before the Dean and a student reached the outside door of the building in which the Academic Senate met, the first service-learning scholar had his faculty advisor!

The three major requirements for the program allow students to combine service experience with study in any academic department. Service-Learning Scholars must:

1. complete at least 15 credit hours of service-learning or service-related classes;
2. volunteer for a minimum of 400 hours of service;
3. complete an integrative service project.

Obviously, students must be dedicated, highly motivated, and very interested in serving the community to complete all the requirements of the program, simply for the special honors they receive at graduation.

The method we have used to move from the concept stage to a fully-functioning program is based on our belief in learning by doing. A group of 30 students and their faculty advisors are building the program in a pilot stage. The pilot year of the program has been wildly exciting and endlessly fascinating. Policy decisions and definitions of all aspects of the program are made by the students involved. As scholars have encountered problems in their path-breaking travels, they have put questions to the whole group. The scholars, in consultation with the two Bennion Center staff have decided answers in a consensual manner. With 30 students involved this is not always an easy task! Students are given enormous freedoms in, and must accept responsibility for, designing their own SLSP. Students decide where they want to spend their 400 hours of volunteer work, which service-learning classes they will take and what their integrative service projects will be. A faculty advisor and Bennion Center staff give support and guidance, but ultimately, the students are responsible for the design of their programs.

The program, as developed through the pilot experiences, will be formalized in a handbook and published and updated annually for the first two years. The basics of the program, as it is evolving, include:

Academic Requirements:

Students must complete 15 hours of courses which incorporate the following eight service-learning criteria:

1. Students provide a needed service to individuals, organizations, schools, or other entities in the community.
2. Service experiences relate to the course subject matter.
3. Activities in the classes provide methods for students to reflect on what they learned through the service experience and how these learnings relate to the subject of the class.
4. The courses offer a method to assess the learning derived from the service. Credit is given for the learning, and its relation to the course, not for the service alone.
5. Service interactions in the community recognize the needs of community members, and offer an opportunity for recipients to be involved in the evaluation of the service.
6. The service opportunities are aimed at the development of the

civic education of citizens even though they may also be focused on career preparation.

7. Knowledge from the disciplines enhances the service experiences in which the students are involved.
8. The classes offer a way to learn from other class members as well as from the instructor.

These courses can be:

■ *Officially designated service-learning classes:* The Bennion Center's Faculty Advisory Committee, with a representative from each of the university's 15 academic colleges, is responsible for approving service-learning classes that meet the eight criteria. Twelve service-learning classes have been approved to date, with a goal of 30 by June, 1994. These classes are listed in the course schedule with an "SL" prefix. Both service-learning classes and the designation of Service-Learning Scholar appear on student transcripts. An example of such a service-learning class follows:

Dr. Blosswick teaches a service-learning, mechanical engineering class. When he taught the course in the traditional manner, students were assigned design problems in the isolation of the lab, focusing on the ergonomics of such things as cars or aircraft components. In 1992, Dr. Blosswick shifted the focus of the class. His students work with Salt Lake County Aging Services to identify needs of senior citizens. Ten teams of students have designed everything from mechanical page turning devices for people with arthritis, to a wheelchair that can tilt its occupant to a standing position (which is being patented by the university). When Dr. Blosswick finished teaching the service-learning course for the first time he said, "It made me realize, with the cold war over, that the future of mechanical engineering is no longer in military hardware, but in the service sector."

■ *Individually planned service-learning class:* the Scholar may also identify any course in the catalog and make arrangements in advance with the professor teaching the class to add a service component that enhances the academic focus of study. The Scholars work with their faculty advisors to make sure the eight criteria for service-learning classes are addressed.

■ *Independent study service-learning class:* A Scholar may work one-on-one with a faculty member to design a course that focuses on a specific area of study. Such a course should contain readings, community service, discussion with the professor, dialogue journal keeping, written papers, and other items the student and professor decide to include.

■ *Service-related class:* The Scholar may identify any existing class that can be justified as necessary for the Scholar's integrative service project. An additional service component is *not* required. At least 50% of the required 15 credit hours must be service-learning classes, while up to 50% can be service-related courses. A student must maintain a GPA of B minus to be eligible to participate in the program.

The Service Requirements of SLSP:

Each Service-Learning Scholar must complete 400 hours of community service. Volunteer hours must be spent fulfilling a

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What Can I Learn From Doing "Grunt Work?"

- If truly outside your role, offer to do the task this one time only, if your resulting gain in experience is likely to be worth the possible costs of being diverted from other tasks or the risk of being seen as an easy mark.
- If you agree, ask the person making the request to teach you something of value in return for your help.
- If you decide to say no, offer a viable explanation based on your defined role, learning plan, and common sense.

A Final Note: A well-designed and competently administered internship is the best kind of joint experiential educational venture, reflecting a learning organization philosophy that places a premium on helping people grow. For the directors of campus-based field experiences, effective internships serve as program validation; they prove how well we have done our job as educators. Therefore, in addition to fully preparing our students, we must also prepare the organizations that host them. We need to make these points:

- You are not "hiring" cheap labor. Internships are learning experiences and the more exposure interns can have to your work, in reasonable depth, the better their education will be.
- Hosting interns is a marvelous way to influence the future, yours and theirs, since they are a "new set of eyes" and may see things you no longer see, or view them in ways you have yet to discover. Think of them as budding consultants, without a magic solution to sell.
- By hosting interns, you have a chance to market your organization and your career field, to an important client—a potential member of your workforce and a potential user of

your products. It is a chance for you and the intern to pre-screen the person-organization match.

- Teach the value of what you do and why grunt work makes your organization run effectively. Interns will be better future employees, managers, and leaders for the experience.

It is valuable to tell students what experiences you have asked work supervisors to be conscious of sharing with their interns; it is valuable to tell work supervisors what strategies you have shared with your students. The better prepared we all are, the better the outcome of the experience.

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Bruce T. "Woody" Caine is Associate Professor in the Department of Human Resources, Peabody College, Vanderbilt University, Nashville TN.

The Service-Learning Scholars Program

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recognized community need through a nonprofit agency or group, through service to the university community, or to an individual person in need. Service activities could include, but are not limited to, direct service, advocacy, public policy development, community organizing, or other activities which meet learning goals identified by the faculty advisor and the Scholar.

Service must be performed without an hourly wage, but service supported through grants, work-study, stipends and/or scholarships may be counted. Community service counted towards the 400-hour requirement must be done without receiving academic credit. Service hours performed for a religious or partisan purpose will not be recognized.

The Scholars are encouraged to volunteer for a variety of service projects in order to educate themselves on the needs of the community and to make a more informed selection of the subject matter for the integrative service project.

All service hours are documented through a "dialogue journal," which the students' faculty advisors read and respond to on a regular basis. One hundred hours of community service can be completed before the Scholar enrolls in the program, by documenting the hours in a written essay.

The Integrative Service Project Requirement:

This project is the major focus of the SLSP and must relate the service-learning classes to the students' volunteer experiences, thus showing in-depth understanding of a particular issue or focus. The students are strongly encouraged to design integrative service projects (ISP) that relate to their majors, although it is not required. Projects should grow out of the experiences and creative ideas of the Scholars and should reflect some degree of originality.

The Scholars must consult with their faculty advisors, Bennion Center Staff, and their supervisory committees to plan the ISP. The projects should meet identified needs in the community, responding to the requests of those being served. Scholars should try to create projects that promote self-sufficiency in individuals, organizations, agencies, etc., rather than dependency on the student.

The Scholars must be able to articulate how the projects allow them to integrate knowledge from the service-learning classes with the service experience. A brief project summary is

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required which becomes a part of a student's permanent record.

Support and Approval of Each Service-Learning Scholar:

A supervisory committee, somewhat analogous to a master's degree committee, advises and certifies each student's program plans and service project. The committee is composed of the Scholar's faculty advisor, one other faculty member, a student representative active in service and appointed by the President of the Associated Students of the University of Utah, a Bennion Center staff person, and a community representative.

Because SLSP involves academics, the role of faculty advisors is very large. Early in the program, Scholars must identify faculty advisors who will help guide them through the academic rigors of the program and ultimately sign off on the completion of the program. The student and faculty advisor have frequent discussion sessions, set learning goals for the program, formulate a work plan, ensure the quality of the integrative service project, identify possible service-learning classes, etc. In our pilot year, faculty advisors have enthusiastically served as mentors and advocates for the Scholars. Periodic meetings are convened of all the faculty advisors and Scholars to discuss common concerns.

The SLSP Director:

The role of the director of service-learning in the pilot year has been to provide support for the Scholars, faculty, and agencies involved in the program. She has brought potential service-learning classes to the attention of the Faculty Advisory Committee for approval, acted as a consultant and advisor for students struggling with problems in the program, tracked and officially noted the progress of each Scholar, organized the program, and served as chief administrator. The staff person meets individually to discuss and set goals with Scholars, discusses the learnings that result from reflection on the service performed by the student, works with campus administrators for recognition of the program, acts as facilitator

for faculty interested in becoming involved in the program as advisors or as teachers of service-learning classes, and works to develop the financial and institutional support necessary to continue the program.

Community Voice in the SLSP:

New Scholars in the program generally begin by sampling various volunteer projects that are ongoing in the Bennion Center. This campus community service center foundation, with a strong commitment to meeting real community needs, and with a well-developed network of agency contacts, is an essential element of the SLSP. Staff, students, and faculty must make constant efforts to include the voices of agencies and community members to assure that their interests and needs are considered and to better effect the planning and actions of the scholars. A community representative with relevant knowledge serves on the student's supervisory committee.

The Future of the SLSP:

What does the future hold for this innovative program for highly motivated students? The program has grown out of our experiences with students, faculty, and service agencies. The future will continue to be experience-based, with refinements along the way. Continued growth of the program will depend on securing ongoing financial support from the University of Utah or other sources. Currently, most funds come from the Commission on National and Community Service. A major goal for the coming year is to explore other avenues of support.

While the Service-Learning Scholars Program is the centerpiece of the Bennion Center's service-learning programs, it is by no means the only one. Development of *Service-Learning Classes* is an ongoing effort at the Bennion Center. The eight criteria considered necessary to the classes are explained to interested professors, and the Bennion Center's Faculty Advisory Committee then reviews and certifies the service-learning content of the proposed courses. The competitively-

awarded *Public Service Professorship* buys release time from designated faculty members' departments so that they can develop service-learning classes or projects. Seven such professorships have been awarded to date to faculty in medicine, economics, languages, pharmacy, psychology, English, and family & consumer studies. The *Borchard Fellows Program* is a three-year research project involving four diverse disciplines. The project will document the outcomes of service-learning classes in engineering, pharmacy, communication, and special education classes. Each of the four classes is taught three consecutive years, first traditionally, followed by two years with a service component. Researchers interview faculty and students after each course. The Bennion Center is embarking on the last year of this study and will have the final paper ready for the 1994 fall quarter. The service-learning *Teaching Assistant* program allows the Bennion Center to train interested students in service-learning methodology. Faculty members apply competitively for the students who assist professors in teaching service-learning classes.

The SLSP has ambitiously sought to provide a win-win-win program for students, faculty, and community members. It has provided an opportunity for motivated students to move beyond hours of service through a campus service center to a much more in-depth service-learning program. The program has allowed students to personalize their educations in ways that empower them to learn from both their service experiences and academic work. It has helped individual faculty members re-dedicate themselves to undergraduate teaching, both in the classroom and as mentors to these students. The program has provided very thoughtful, dedicated, and action-oriented volunteers to agencies that desire partnerships with Service-Learning Scholars.

Linda Bonar is the Director of Service-Learning Programs at University of Utah.

Irene Fisher is the Director of the Lowell Bennion Community Service Center at University of Utah.