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## Origins, Evolution, and Progress: Reflections on a Movement

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*This article traces the evolution of the community service movement on college campuses over the past 10 years. The author also analyzes the development of the movement through three conceptual strands—student leadership, institutional support, and service learning—weaving them into a narrative of the recent decade.*

# Origins, Evolution, and Progress: *Reflections on a Movement*

This article describes the development of the community service movement in higher education over the past decade. I will sketch the evolution of the movement in three overlapping stages: student leadership, institutional support, and service learning. The result, I hope, will be a conceptual history of our approaches to and understandings of campus-based community service, a history that critically examines the forces that have and have not shaped the movement's evolution.

The service movement as we know it comes late in a long lineage of similar national efforts. It inherits the lessons and results of initiatives that go back decades, if not centuries. Although the word "origins" appears in the title, this article will make no attempt to provide a complete history. I hope only to describe the contemporary contexts that gave rise to its internal events during the past ten years, and to order the events into conceptual categories.

## **Student Leadership: Catalyzing a Movement**

Our story begins with the generational stereotype of college students in the 1980s. The origins of the "me generation" label may be found in at least two

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influential bodies of research. The first is the annual freshmen surveys of attitudes, beliefs, and values conducted by the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute (Astin, 1975-1995). Over the decade leading up to the mid-1980s, Alexander Astin's data demonstrated a growing materialism and greed among college students, along with a steady decline in expected participation in political life and concern for the interests of others. Between 1972 and 1984, students increasingly endorsed the value of "being very well-off financially," while the values showing the greatest declines were "developing a meaningful philosophy of life," "participating in community affairs," "cleaning up the environment," and "promoting racial understanding" (Astin, op.cit.; Newman, 1985). Arthur Levine's book *When Dreams and Heroes Died: A Portrait of Today's College Student* (1980) corroborated the UCLA data. When students were asked who their heroes were, the most common response was no one. Athletes and entertainers were mentioned less frequently, and political leaders were hardly mentioned at all. Cynical about politics, government, and social institutions in general, the students in Levine's study appeared to have no outward aspirations; they were most concerned about getting a job and making money.

Such stereotypes never provide an accurate characterization of a generation, and it is important to place these findings within the political and economic context in which students were coming of age. Recession and high unemployment in the early 1980s led many Americans (not only students) to be anxious about their economic futures. Media and corporate images glorified the pursuit of material wealth. Cuts in federal welfare programs and human services sanctioned public indifference to growing poverty and lack of opportunity, and deregulation legitimized the market forces and unchecked individualism whose fixations on self and profit marginalized social responsibility.

It was against this backdrop that students of a different sort made their mark. While many young people were riding the tide of materialism into yuppiedom, others were troubled by the increasingly visible social and environmental decay that the government and free market were unwilling or unable to reverse. Indeed, many students understood that the problems would worsen in their lifetimes if they did not respond. And if they could not trust distant political processes to yield solutions, then they would take direct action closer to home.

Although many campuses had long traditions of student community ser-

vice before the 1980s, these initiatives enjoyed new publicity in the wake of several catalytic events. One of the earliest and most notable was Wayne Meisel's 1,500-mile walk from Maine to Washington, D.C. in the summer of 1984. Meisel, then a recent Harvard graduate, visited 70 campuses in 13 states and delivered an inspiring call to service that struck a chord among hundreds of students who wanted to serve but lacked the opportunities and support. As a follow-up, Meisel, together with Bobby Hackett and Jack Hasegawa, founded COOL, the Campus Outreach Opportunity League, in the fall of 1984. The organization galvanized old and new efforts into an emergent national movement. COOL helped focus national attention on students who belied the "me generation" stereotype, and stories about a new wave of student volunteerism began to appear in the press.

The fact that *students* catalyzed the contemporary service movement in higher education is significant in one central respect: It showed that the earlier survey results and labels did not indicate a generational defect in character. The disengagement of college students could not be chalked up to pure apathy and selfishness. Their idealism was intact but buried, and they would find ways to express it if they were given proper support and opportunities. This notion became the defining premise of the movement at its inception.

At the campus level, programs began with simple goals: Get students involved. Make a difference directly and tangibly. Students started recycling programs on campus. They tutored children in local schools and organized after-school enrichment activities. They staffed soup kitchens and homeless shelters, provided companionship for elderly people, counseled battered women, built houses during spring breaks, led holiday drives, and raised funds for local nonprofits. Their activities might be described as traditional "volunteering," and many campuses began to post increases in participation.

On other campuses, community service did not occur through coordinated programs per se, but through a diffuse array of loosely supervised individual placements. Training was inconsistent, and evaluation was largely absent. Indeed, this period evidenced many efforts to provide students with basic skills in program development. COOL published a resource book called *Building a Movement* (Hackett and Meisel, 1986) that contained nuts-and-bolts advice for students on how to start service organizations and programs. A few years later, COOL helped students to balance their attention on recruitment and organizational structure with an emphasis on program quality by developing and disseminating its "Five Critical Elements of Quality Com-

munity Service": community voice, orientation and training, meaningful action, reflection, and evaluation.

But even as students developed expertise in programming, their efforts on many campuses were hampered by inadequate resources and weak institutional support. A lack of full-time administrative staff compromised supervision, quality control, and program continuity. Community partnerships waxed and waned as students came and went. Reflection and evaluation were afterthoughts. Shoestring budgets meant that dorm rooms doubled as program offices and that borrowed or donated materials were the norm. With extraordinary creativity and resourcefulness, students turned ideas into action, but sustainability was not a hallmark of their efforts. The scrappy, impromptu nature of student-driven programming was epitomized by the title of another COOL resource book, *On Your Mark. Go! Get Set* (Meisel and Scatliff, 1988).

However, it is important to note that many student-initiated programs still exist today. Moreover, the determined, entrepreneurial spirit that first animated the movement persists and now enjoys formal support. The John Gardner Fellowships in Public Service, the Points of Light Foundation's YES (Youth Engaged in Service) Ambassadors, Youth Service America's Fund for Social Entrepreneurs, the New Generation Training Program, Southern Community Partners, and many other initiatives are now actively working to preserve and nurture the legacy of idealism and individual initiative born during the movement's origins.

Two additional observations about this early period are important to the later evolution of the movement. First, many students who got involved at the campus level were not motivated to do community service per se. They acted out of concern for substantive issues such as homelessness, education, domestic violence, or environmental degradation. They viewed community service as a means of addressing the problems they cared about, not as a defined agenda or movement unto itself. Widespread student identification with a service movement did not occur until later, when community service centers were established on campuses, and when national organizations gained greater prominence. This tension—between service as its own agenda and service as a means of pursuing other agendas—persists today.

Second, the programs most often cited as models during this period were long-standing centers at elite institutions, such as Phillips Brooks House at Harvard and Dwight Hall at Yale. The press, it seemed, liked the spin of

America's "best and brightest" reaching out to help poor people in the spirit of charity and noblesse oblige. Regardless of what was happening programmatically, service became associated with this problematic paradigm, and for years to come, the movement struggled against a perception of patronizing do-goodism. Nationally, student leadership in the movement reached a peak in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In recent years, however, student leadership has been dampened as the field has grown to include other players, and as it has become more bureaucratized nationally and institutionally. Reviewers of grant applications for service projects report a consistent absence of student leadership in proposed program designs and implementation plans. Similarly, student participation in program governance and decision making tends to be spotty and sometimes token. Moreover, in the face of a severe budget crunch in 1995, COOL downsized and nearly dissolved. It survived, but its voice in the field no longer dominates as it once did. Today more resources and larger initiatives are at stake. There is more competition and political calculation. The forces that drive the movement now are different from the forces that brought it into existence. Even as students continue to find purposeful roles in the changing context, the character of the movement has itself changed.

Yet these latter observations should not obscure the significance of the contemporary movement's first stage. If sophistication and sustainability were not the hallmarks of student-driven programs, then authenticity and innovation were. From our perspective today, we can say that idealism alone is not enough to sustain a movement. But it was enough to galvanize a movement, and college students did just that. With COOL's leadership, they captured the national imagination with "the vision that young people can make a difference and compelled us to understand the problem of widespread disengagement not in terms of generational apathy, but in terms of inadequate opportunity and institutional support."

### **Institutional Response #1: Leadership and Support**

The institutional response students wanted was not far behind. In the latter half of the 1980s, American higher education attracted substantial public concern over rising tuition costs, poor undergraduate teaching, curricular controversies, and misuse of indirect cost recovery. This constellation of issues called for clarification—if not reexamination—of higher education's purpose in American society.

In 1985 Frank Newman, president of the Education Commission of the States (ECS), authored a prescient Carnegie Foundation report describing the central role of colleges and universities in the nation's social and economic renewal. In *Higher Education and the American Resurgence* (1985) Newman addressed important issues related to research, general education, financial aid, and minority students. But he centered the report on a single, urgent theme, "The most critical demand is to restore to higher education its original purpose of preparing graduates for a life of involved and committed citizenship" (p. xiv). This vision of civic involvement led, in November 1985, to the founding of Campus Compact, as a project of ECS.

In January 1986, the Compact convened several dozen college and university presidents to discuss the purpose and structure of the organization. The group achieved an easy consensus on the essential premise for sustained activity at an institutional level: Increasing student participation in community service required visible, high-level leadership and institutional support.

During this stage the principal activity at the campus level was the development of administrative infrastructures to support community service programming. In response to advocacy by COOL, many institutions appointed a staff-level "green dean," usually a recent graduate of the school, to serve as a campus-wide coordinator of service activities. Some campuses established a center with a mid- to high-level administrator as director, several staff members or students in charge of various project areas, and a board of directors providing policy guidance and fund-raising assistance. Community service found a home variously under student affairs, academic affairs, campus ministry, the president, or the offices of career planning, but regardless of where it was centered organizationally, it tended to elicit involvement from a broad network of campus units. Whatever the strategy from campus to campus, the defining activity of this phase was the commitment of institutional resources. The Haas Center at Stanford and the Swearer Center at Brown, among others, emerged as models because of the substantial funding and visible presidential support they enjoyed.

Many campuses witnessed an increase in student participation during this period of institutional investment. A 1989-90 study (Levine and Hirsch, 1991) heralded a shift in student attitudes toward "collective optimism" and increased opportunities for community service. Programs also became more sophisticated. Green deans built partnerships with local schools and community agencies, developed placements, provided formal orientation and train-

ing for students, and ensured an overall level of quality. Holiday drives, one-time events, and bare-bone projects were upgraded into ongoing programs coordinated by full-time staff or paid students, and service activities often involved students working in teams. Program designs began to incorporate reflection and evaluation components, and program continuity and sustainability became increasingly significant considerations in planning. The ten Wingspread Principles of Good Practice (Honnet and Poulsen, 1990) provided a widely accepted means of defining quality and accountability, and enabled service programs to argue that they were worthy of institutional and outside support.

At the national level, the peer pressure that college presidents exerted through Campus Compact complemented the efforts students were making through COOL. Compact membership grew five-fold in a decade, from 105 institutions in 1986 to 500 institutions today, with 100 new schools joining during the 1993-94 year alone. Presidential buy-in and momentum at the institutional level secured the status of campus-based community service as a distinct policy agenda.

Reducing financial disincentives to service was an especially significant policy objective, as higher education prepared for an imminent period of fiscal austerity. Campuses looked to changes in Federal Work-Study regulations and national service legislation for funds to support students who wanted to serve but could not afford to volunteer. In addition, private foundations responded with initiatives such as the Bonner Scholars, which offers tuition assistance for students who take on a substantial service commitment during college. Many institutions raised funds from local foundations, businesses, and individual donors for public service fellowships and minigrants for student projects.

The growing coalition also supported state and federal legislation specifically designed to strengthen the service movement and its infrastructure. In California, for example, the nascent state Campus Compact helped promote the "human corps" legislation of 1987, which encouraged four-year public institutions to provide opportunities for every student to serve during college. The passage of national service legislation in 1990 and in 1993 sounded the call for institutional participation at the federal level, which generated strong echoes from several major higher education associations. Federal legislation was integral to building the state and national infrastructure that now facilitates peer support and dialogue in the field. In its first two rounds



of higher education grants in 1991 and 1992, the Commission on National and Community Service provided substantial support to the Campus Compact and its emerging state affiliates. Furthermore, the federal effort located campus-based initiatives within a broader national context of service programs, including youth corps and K-12 initiatives, in order to foster collaboration across the different "streams" of service.

This stage of the movement is continuing; while 50 percent of service programs at Campus Compact schools received institutional funds in 1990, this figure rose to 92 percent in 1994. Increasing student and institutional participation, developing infrastructure at campus, state, and national levels, ensuring a basic level of quality in programming, and defining service as a distinct agenda of institutional and public policy—these activities continue to comprise much of the work of the movement.

### **Institutional Response #2: Service Learning**

Yet there is a third, more recent stage that is becoming the movement's defining paradigm: the move toward service learning. Service learning has many antecedents in the field of experiential education. The term itself has been used since the 1960s. It generated a substantial literature before 1985, mostly through the publications of the now defunct National Center for Service Learning.

A constellation of events in 1990 signaled the definitive arrival of service learning in the service movement. First, Ernest Boyer wrote a Carnegie Foundation report titled *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990), which played a role at this juncture of the movement similar to Frank Newman's report five years earlier. Boyer urged the nation's faculty to expand and update its notion of scholarship in order to make it responsive to the needs of today's society. Second, as a result of a seminal report by Tim Stanton (1990), Campus Compact initiated its flagship Project on Integrating Service with Academic Study, which continues to assist campuses in building community service into their curriculum. Third, the Wingspread principles legitimized not only service programs in general, but also service learning programs in particular. Finally, the three-volume resource book *Combining Service and Learning* (Kendall, 1990a), published by the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE), did more than any other single publication to establish a recognized field of programming called service learning. The NSEE books contained dozens of salient articles that had been written over more than a decade, and gave them

a new and timely significance. The three volumes are still widely regarded as the "textbooks" of the field.

These events crystallized two key notions that were gaining recognition in the movement (Kendall, 1990b). First, community service is not a self-activating learning experience. Critical reflection, deliberately integrated into the program structure, is essential to ensure that service experiences foster real learning, instead of reinforcing stereotypes or perpetuating ignorance. Second, community service will not be institutionalized within higher education unless it is aligned with the core mission of education. The absence of faculty involvement in the first two stages of the movement was a cause for concern (Kennedy and Warren, 1989). Both presidents and program directors shared the conviction that demonstrating educational relevance was crucial to moving community service from the margin to the mainstream of their institutions.

With these two ideas as premises, practitioners began to distinguish between community service and service learning. The distinction mattered programmatically and strategically, and today we find ourselves in the thick of a service learning movement. Significantly, unlike the previous two stages, this mode of institutional response arose within the academy itself. It was a response not to external circumstances in society or to public perceptions of higher education, but to the internal priorities and norms of educational institutions: relating service to education was a demand the movement made of itself. I believe this explains the particular vigor with which the field has embraced service learning: the movement has centered its efforts on making service a part of the educational agenda. Co-curricular service programs beefed up their reflection components into credit-bearing seminars with structured readings, discussions, and writing projects. Yet the dominant strategy has been to build service into the curriculum itself. On campus, program leaders began working to generate interest among faculty, orienting them to service-learning concepts and enticing them with minigrants to revise existing courses or to develop new ones. Professors in applied fields like social work, nursing, education, and engineering were among the first participants, as were long-time advocates of internship, cooperative education, and related modes of experiential learning. A key challenge continues to be the involvement of faculty from mainstream disciplines, particularly the humanities and natural sciences. In addition to (or in place of) green deans, service-learning coordinators organize workshops on pedagogy and assist faculty by

developing placements appropriate for course learning objectives. At the same time that programs began to evidence service placements with criteria related to educational value, they also began to envision community agencies not simply as vehicles for placement but also as partners in education.

Organizationally, where service initiatives are housed on campus matter more than they did before. While most programs continue to fall under student affairs, a growing number report to an academic unit or dean (Cha and Rothman, 1994). Wherever they are located, programs seek to develop a unifying educational framework for their activities. Models of this stage include the Citizenship and Service Education program at Rutgers University, with its strong linkage between citizenship and the liberal arts; the Lowell Bennion Center at the University of Utah, with its emerging relation between service learning and socially responsive knowledge; Project Place at Bentley College, an example of interdisciplinary collaboration at a single community agency; Portland State University's ambitious integration of service learning into general education (White, 1994); and the Feinstein Institute at Providence College, with its unique and evolving major in public and community service studies. Some of these examples, as well as others, are described in other contributions to this issue of *Metropolitan Universities*. Together they have transformed service from an expression of noblesse oblige into an important mode of civic, moral, and cognitive learning (Ehrlich, 1995).

Nationally, we have witnessed a number of related developments. Over the past four years, Campus Compact's Project on Integrating Service with Academic Study has worked intensively with 60 campuses through its summer institutes, and it has consulted with 100 more. Most participating campuses report that the number of service-learning courses they offer has significantly increased in the last three years. Furthermore, three years after NSEE published its three-volume set, the University of Michigan developed a faculty casebook on service learning called *Praxis I* (Howard, 1993), which opens with an article that provides ten "Principles of Good Practice in Community Service-Learning Pedagogy," a Wingspread analog specifically written for faculty. Similarly, service learning penetrated the student-led agenda with COOL's Teaming Up initiative and its publication of *Education and Action* (Lieberman and Connolly, 1992). Last year, a scholarly journal emerged that is devoted to service learning, as well as the establishment of a much used Internet discussion group. In addition, a national corps of faculty committed to service learning formed the Invisible College. The group, which

convened its first "National Gathering" this year, is developing a discipline-specific series of monographs on service learning.

With funds from foundations and their own budgets, national organizations such as the American Association of Community Colleges, the American Association for Higher Education, the Council of Independent Colleges, and the United Negro College Fund have also launched initiatives promoting service learning on their member campuses. At the federal level, the Corporation for National Service in 1993 named its campus-based grant program "Learn and Serve America: Higher Education." The \$10 million program explicitly tilts its funding objectives toward service learning and models its selection criteria on existing principles of good practice.

Clearly, service learning has struck a responsive chord at the campus and national levels. The sheer magnitude of material and intellectual resources devoted to it distinguishes this stage from the others. Yet its significance in the evolution of the movement has at least two other dimensions. First, as a specific type of community service programming, service learning has brought into sharp relief the major challenges of practice. While student participation and institutional investment remain important, the movement has taken a distinctively programmatic turn toward issues of quality. These issues have become at once more numerous and more specialized. Quite importantly, however, even as those in the field work to resolve the extensive variation in practice, it has defined a near-canonical set of challenges that suggests the presence of shared norms.

With sound models for program start-up, attention now turns toward sustainability. In community partnerships, programs are seeking not cooperation but collaboration. Having worked through the issues of recruitment, orientation, and training, practitioners now struggle with the complexities of reflection, curricular integration, and evaluation. Defining standards for quality reflection, creating incentives for faculty participation, connecting service activities with course content, measuring program impacts on students and communities, and developing a research agenda on both participation and outcomes are among the key issues that will preoccupy the field for years to come. These problems are contested and often refined into "sub-" and "sub-sub-" problems through vigorous discourse. Yet they are circumscribed by agreement on a central, specific problematic—how to combine service and learning effectively—that narrows the movement and its trajectory. In addition, the typical contexts in which these issues are discussed—for example,

Internet discussion groups and conferences of higher education professionals—implicitly establish who is important to the discourse.

Second, service learning has provided the current movement with a wedge into critical issues at the very core of the academy. The rhetoric of service, once reflective of its important yet ancillary status on campus, now invokes nothing less than fundamental notions of scholarship, pedagogy, and educational reform. For example, Ernest Boyer's brief proposal for "the New American College" (1994), arguing for strong connections between theory and practice, found its way onto the field's reading list with only oblique reference to service learning. Within community colleges, service learning is beginning to gain leverage from the larger agenda of school-to-work transition. Moreover, not only as a way of organizing service but also a way of teaching and learning, service learning aims to transform the relationship between campus and community out of educational necessity. It broaches the sensitive issue of teaching values, and it even calls into question what counts as knowledge (Palmer, 1987; Liu, 1995). Ten years ago, it would have been difficult to predict that the service movement would penetrate issues of institutional purpose as deeply as it has.

In sum, the ascendance of service learning continues to marshal significant financial and intellectual resources behind the agenda of connecting service with education. Guided by well-formed notions of program quality, the field has achieved a degree of specialization in its programmatic concerns that reflects its maturity. Even as practice continues to vary, it is anchored within a particular conceptual framework. The many specific issues that remain unresolved will define the substance of publications, conferences, and discussions—as well as their participants—for several years. How long service learning will be the movement's dominant paradigm is difficult to predict. But because it is a response driven by the norms of its own institutional context, it has the potential for longevity.

A follow-up article, in a forthcoming issue of *Metropolitan Universities*, will examine whether the story of the service learning movement as described here constitutes a story of progress.

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