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Imagining a Functional Partnership Between Leadership Development and Service-Learning Programs

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"If educators are to play a critical role in the development of ethical, responsible citizens, we cannot discuss the concept of leadership unless we discuss the concept of service" (Delve & Rice, 1990).

Student activities professionals are wearing more hats each day. One of the most recent chapeaux they have donned is that of the community service coordinator. Community service-learning has become one of the newest areas that falls within the student activities realm on campuses across the country. If student activities offices are not directly responsible for coordinating service programs and advising student service organizations, they are being asked to work closely with those on campus who do.

Since becoming involved in working with faculty, staff and institutional leaders on college and university campuses whose responsibilities include coordinating service initiatives, I have noticed a tremendous overlap of roles relative to leadership and service-learning. This role expansion has, again, exposed the need for a shared understanding of student leadership programs and service-learning initiatives. There is much that we can learn from and offer to each other, to keep our students' benefit from the partnership between leadership and service-learning in higher education.

Often students involved in recognized student organizations on campus are provided numerous leadership development opportunities such as skill-building workshops, retreats, seminars, and ceremonies to recognize their contributions as student leaders. They are frequently labeled "leader," and unfortunately go from experience to experience without much intentional processing of what they have learned. Many students, who are not affiliated with recognized student organizations but are leading through service to their communities, are not often labeled "leaders." Many times the students involved in service do not receive any formal leadership training, are loosely advised or are not connected to a campus office, and are not recognized for their leadership contributions. However, these students do intentionally reflect on their experience to discover meaning in their service and leadership involvement.

Delve and Rice (1990) provide an organizing framework for linking leadership development programs and service-learning opportunities where all students benefit. Most of the following examples are taken directly from their work. These examples are organized into two types of applications, integrating service in leadership programs and providing leadership development opportunities for those who are involved in service-learning experiences and/or service organizations.

Application: What it looks like to use service-learning in leadership programs

Retreats and Workshops

- Invite guest speakers who make the connection between leadership and service
- Incorporate a service project into a retreat for student leaders
- Provide community service as a module in a leadership program series
- Use interactive games such as "The Game of Life" or "BaFa, BaFa" at workshops or retreats where students are role playing people who are from different backgrounds than themselves

Orientation Programs

- Incorporate an urban plunge into orientation leader training
- Plan a one-day or half-day community service project for new students during welcome week activities
- Incorporate service projects or an on-going service project into a new student course

Leadership Courses

- Create a panel discussion of community leaders
- Require students to be involved in a course-long service project
- Create an assignment where each student interviews a community leader and does a speech about what was learned
- Develop a mentor program where college students and community leader mentors do a service project together
- Discuss Robert Greenleaf's (1977) Servant Leadership concept when discussing leadership theories
- When mentoring leaders, use examples of leaders within communities

Recognition

- Publish a leadership newsletter highlighting student leaders involved in service-learning as well as students involved in student organizations
- Create a community service award for your annual student leadership recognition ceremony
- Nominate students for the Howard Swearer Student Humanitarian Award, presented by Campus Compact

Greeks and Activities

- Encourage and continue to mention the philanthropic activities of Greek organizations
- Encourage student organizations to take on an on-going service project (i.e. adopt an elementary school or tutor children)
- Require a certain amount of service hours for student organizations to maintain recognition status
- Have students structure reflection sessions following meetings and events so that they can make meaning out of their experiences.
- Facilitate a discussion about leadership and followership after a service project (were there times when the student "leaders" followed the lead of the community member and vice versa)
- Enlist student organizations's involvement in campus-wide service projects (Into the Streets, Make a Difference Day, etc.)

Application: What it looks like to provide leadership development experiences for students involved in service-learning:

Advising

- Provide leadership training specifically for those who lead service organizations
- Encourage students involved in service to attend campus-wide leadership workshops
- Assist students in exploring career opportunities in the non-profit sector, or jobs that contain an element of using their skills for the betterment of society

Retreats

- Develop a service leadership retreat and/or conference
- Encourage students to attend service leadership conferences (e.g. Campus Outreach Opportunity League)
- Discuss the appreciate of diversity issues in context of students' service experiences

Service-Learning Courses

- Encourage students to take academic service-learning courses, where they receive academic credit for doing service work and completing related assignments
- Encourage students to ask their professors if they can do their assignments based on their on-going service experiences
- When discussing Nancy Schlossberg's Marginality and Mattering concept, broaden your examples to include people in your surrounding community
- Present and discuss the Social Change Model for Leadership Development (1996) and discuss each value as it relates to the larger community context

Involving Community Leaders in Service Programs

- Invite a community leader in to train students who want to be involved in service
- Invite a speaker who is a leader in the community to speak to interested students
- Coordinate a student organization/volunteer fair where agencies host tables and describe volunteer opportunities for students to sign-up to volunteer

Other Thoughts

If we are to honor this emerging functional partnership between leadership and service-learning, then it seems imperative that we explore some other issues. Among these are issues of ethics, which focus on doing the right thing for the right reasons and leadership/service-learning for what; diversity, including the power and privilege dilemma; and globalization/internationalization, including the advancement of an ethic of citizenship and the importance of creating community. Another issue is assessment, which involves exploring the assumptions about the relative importance of our learning, actions, and intentions of why we do what we do, as well as the efficacy of leadership and service-learning activities independently and collectively.

There are many more ways in which you can integrate service-learning and leadership development on campus. The more that students who are involved in service experiences can be involved with leadership training, development, and education, the more empowered and capable they can feel to lead. Students who are involved in student organizations can benefit from the intentional reflection model, which is used in the service-learning community. All student leaders should be encouraged to keep track of their experiences, which helps them reflect on and articulate the skills gathered from involvement in their experiences. If all of our student leaders start to explore the answer to the "leadership for what?" question, real transformation and social change begin. An eventual outcome will hopefully be an active, committed, citizen leader who will graduate and continue to make a difference as a leader in their respective community.

References

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