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Joining Campus and Community Through Service Learning

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commitment to the needs of others toward a broad concern for justice, lived out day by day, in the larger society. Service learning provides a way for students to bridge the separation between rigor and relevance and, in the process, to discover different needs and different cultures, to awaken to issues of power, and to learn what it means to be a member of a group. As this chapter has described, when encountered with respect, the community can play an essential role in this process of moral growth.

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The establishment of a working partnership between the campus and community requires both partners to work through a parallel process of assessment, program design, implementation, and evaluation.

Joining Campus and Community Through Service Learning

Debbie Cotton, Timothy K. Stanton

Involving students in community-service learning requires campus program coordinators and community-agency staff to collaborate in program development. Often, because service-learning programs and community organizations have different goals and priorities, separate constituencies, and even varied organizational cultures, they design their programs independently and at cross-purposes. When this occurs, neither organization achieves its goals for students or for the community.

Successful service-learning programs bridge this gap between "town and gown" by cultivating a spirit of reciprocity, interdependence, and collaboration. When carefully considered, expressed, negotiated, and agreed upon, the needs and resources of each organization become complementary and mutually enhancing. This is not easy, however. Campus and community organizations may have competing goals, timetables, and agendas. Nevertheless, from the authors' experiences both on campuses and in communities following a program-design model and asking certain essential questions are the keys to establishing programs that effectively serve campus, community, and students.

Assessing and Determining Guidelines for the Partnership

As in launching any new partnership, campus and community organizations bring to service-learning relationships their particular sets of needs, expectations, and philosophies as to how the relationship should work.

However, because these are expressions of different communities with different experiences, they may conflict. The problems of both town and gown are real. Communication between the two communities is critical and each partner—the community agency and the campus program—must put forward and agree upon program goals and expectations. Many of these issues concern philosophical goals of the two parties. Establishing a philosophical base for community service is essential in procuring a collaborative relationship between the campus and the community. The following questions may be useful in determining this base:

What Responsibility Does an Institution Have to the Community?

With the burgeoning popularity of student volunteerism, there is a great temptation on the part of campus staff to respond immediately to student initiatives and to place students in community service as quickly as possible. However, before placing students, staff, and if possible, student volunteers need to ask themselves the question: Is this service truly needed by the community? A more thoughtful (and ultimately more effective) process requires exploration of community problems in collaboration with community leaders, identifying along with them needs that students can effectively serve.

For example, before it designed and implemented a tutoring program, Stanford University's Haas Center for Public Service spent several months exploring with officials of a local school district various roles that students could play. The goal of the relationship, as viewed by both the Haas Center and the school district, is long-term school improvement for the district and experiential learning about the problems of urban schools for students.

What Responsibility Does the Campus Program Have to Students?

Can eager but unprepared students do more harm than good? Without an understanding of what students are walking into, coordinators can inadvertently provide a service experience that has negative consequences for both students (discouraging them from community service forever) and agencies (where discouraged students fail to meet the needs of organizations). A frustrating experience with even one student can sour an agency on ever working with students "from that school" again. As a result, many campus programs practice preventive maintenance by offering prefield training and support. Cornell University's Field and International Study Program requires a preparation course for all students before they begin their service-learning experience (Giles, 1987; Whitham and Stanton, 1979).

What Responsibility Does the Community Have to the Campus Program? An influx of students into community agencies can be a mixed blessing. Students enter the community in September with big ideas, energy, and enthusiasm. By December, the attendance of these same students may become inconsistent because exams and papers demand more

of their time. Due to this cyclical behavior, students may earn a reputation for being unreliable, and agencies become wary of greeting them with open arms.

Community organizations need to acknowledge the limitations of students' time and skills. With this understanding, they also need to think through how they will use students effectively and who in the agency will provide necessary training and supervision. If agencies have reservations about hosting student volunteers and if they have specific expectations of campus program staff, they should communicate these expectations to and negotiate them with campus staff before a program begins.

For example, the Field Studies Program at the University of California, Los Angeles, requires students to negotiate job responsibilities, expectations, and time commitments with the agency staff. The student and the agency supervisor sign a written contract that is also signed by the students' faculty sponsor and the Field Studies Office before the student begins his or her service experience.

What Responsibility Does the Community Have to Students? Taking on students requires a commitment by the agency. The students give their time in exchange for a work and learning experience. In return for their service, students want opportunities to talk with professional staff, to ask questions, and to learn how a community agency works to solve problems. Accepting this premise may require that an agency look critically at its human resources to determine how it will both use and support service learners. Student volunteers need both professional supervision and opportunities to learn about the broader issues in which an agency is involved. Organizations need to identify who will provide this and how it will be done.

For instance, the American Red Cross has a volunteer-development system. Potential volunteers are interviewed through the Volunteer Personnel Office, are made aware of the agency's priority needs, and work with a supervisor to structure a volunteer career path based on their interests. As a result of their investment in volunteer-management structures, the American Red Cross has a loyal core of long-term volunteers.

What Responsibility Does the Student Have to the Community? For many students, a service-learning experience may be their first exposure to working with people in need. It may be the first time that other people are significantly affected by their actions. Thus, student volunteers need to be reminded of basic job-skill manners such as contacting their agency if they are going to be late or if they will miss a day. Students may also need to be told about agency requirements for client confidentiality. While students can bring fresh ideas to the community, they need to be sensitive to the culture of the agency and have an understanding of appropriate strategies for initiating change. Campus programs need to identify

how students will learn about the responsibilities and obligations of community service.

For the past seventeen years, students at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., have participated through the School of Education in the Service Learning Course, with a required sixteen-hour-per-week internship. Not only are students briefed about the need for confidentiality, but they also examine their own prejudices about "people in need," reflect on their relationship to the community, and read and discuss contemporary fiction to develop their understanding of how a community works.

The five questions just discussed should be addressed by representatives of community organizations and campus service-learning programs as they contemplate working together. Having reviewed their responses and identified and assessed their ability to be strong partners in such a reciprocal and philosophically complementary relationship, they should be ready to work together.

Training and Supervision

Having decided to work together, and having determined the philosophical and practical nature of their relationship and the student service learning it will support, community organizations and campus programs may next turn their attention to issues of training and supervision. Typically, it is assumed that only the students need training before they go out to work in the community. However, there may also be a need to train faculty, campus staff, and agency personnel involved in the program.

The content and structure of training and supervision in service-learning programs will vary according to program goals and service tasks established. However, given that each constituency (faculty, campus staff, and agency personnel) has its own objectives for service learning (for example, faculty want students to learn more about specific issues, campus staff want students to grow personally, and agency staff need to get a job done), each constituency will need to be responsible for providing training and supervision that meets its particular objective for student volunteers. Again, a set of questions illuminating this "reciprocity principle" may be helpful.

What Training Resources Should Be Provided to Faculty or Program Staff Before They Send Students into the Community? Following the reciprocity principle, the campus program provides resources for the faculty on how to structure a service-learning experience that may be academically oriented, career-related, or faith-based. For example, at Brevard Community College in Florida, the faculty wanted service learning to be part of the curriculum, but they were not sure how to implement

this idea. In order to incorporate service learning into the curriculum, the Service Learning Center staff developed a three-pronged approach that built in relevant training for faculty through the faculty-development program and organized a faculty advisory committee that persuaded key faculty and administrators to accept the values of and the need for service learning. In addition, the Service Learning Center staff devised a model course easily adapted to a variety of disciplines so that faculty did not have to reinvent a new service-learning curriculum for each course.

There are issues and skills involved in effectively placing students in community service with which campus staff should be familiar. As the Service Learning Model illustrates, it is important to assess a student's community-service background and to organize appropriate volunteer and reflection opportunities accordingly. For example, entering a student who has never been exposed directly to homeless people into a direct-service position at a homeless shelter may be overwhelming for the student and inappropriate. This may lead the student to drop out of the program and become soured on volunteerism altogether. It may be more appropriate to have this student initially serve in a one-day shelter clean-up project in a group setting. In this experience the student may not interact with the homeless, but he or she can become familiar with the environment of the homeless, learn about the homeless population, and receive recognition for his or her efforts. Campus staff must consider how they will assess the readiness of student volunteers and place them in appropriately challenging service experiences.

The Philadelphia Center of the Great Lakes Colleges Association has each student meet with a learning-process coordinator to discuss his or her interests and goals. Students complete an occupational assessment test, and the results are correlated with a computer database of community needs, developed from occupational assessment categories. The "high-tech, high-touch" approach is combined to give the best possible placement for the student volunteer.

What Training and Resources Should Be Provided to Agency Staff in Preparation for Working with Student Volunteers? When a community agency decides to bring student volunteers into their organization, they make an implicit commitment to hire a volunteer coordinator and train the staff to work effectively with volunteers. It is critical that a qualified staff person be designated as the volunteer coordinator and be given the time to administer the agency's volunteer program, acting as a bridge between staff and student volunteers. Agencies should conduct regular pre- and in-service training programs to enhance staff skills in effectively managing student volunteers.

The agency training program "Working with Student Volunteers," sponsored by the Volunteer Clearinghouse of Washington, D.C., used the

Service Learning Model as a tool to train agency personnel to assess students' developmental phases. This enabled agency staff to design appropriate student volunteer jobs.

What Training and Supervision Should the Campus Provide to Students? Here the reciprocity principle holds as well. The campus program provides training and supervision that relates to its objectives for student volunteers. Therefore, campus training might focus on making students self-managed volunteers and self-directed service learners, on helping them to learn from experiences and monitor and assess their service learning. As an example, the Community Involvement Center at San Francisco State University holds weekly small-group reflection meetings for their 146-member volunteer force. The reflection sessions are led by trained student volunteers and allow students to share and reflect on the successes and failures of their service-learning experiences.

What Training and Supervision Should the Agency Provide to Students? A well-designed agency training and supervision program will enable students to perform their jobs and grow personally at the same time. American Red Cross volunteers receive an annual briefing on the range of direct-service and leadership positions available, meet with their supervisor to review their performance, and then refine their volunteer-development plan. In this way, the Red Cross can move highly motivated people into leadership positions.

Other options for training students do exist. For instance, since school districts may be unable to, many campuses offer tutor-training seminars. In addition to task-oriented supervision, some community agencies offer students opportunities to reflect on their service experiences and provide them with an opportunity to learn about the organization's mission and challenges. It is suggested that campus programs and community organizations should agree on who is going to conduct training, supervision, and reflection that will meet each partner's objectives for a successful service-learning experience.

Assessment and Evaluation

Every partnership needs time for the parties to meet and assess their progress. In the case of service learning, there is also a need periodically to assess and evaluate whether the campus and community are continuing to derive expected benefits and are meeting their obligations to each other through their relationship.

In determining who is responsible for which aspect of this evaluation process, the reciprocity principle again applies. Each constituent is responsible for assessment and evaluation related to its objectives for the student's service-learning experience. It is important that the reciprocity principle be thoughtfully applied here because the objectives of each

constituent are different and thus require different assessment and evaluation methods and criteria. We will again use a set of questions to discuss this issue.

What Responsibility Does the Campus Have to the Community? For the campus program, with its educational objectives, the fact that students successfully learn about and confront human problems may be a sufficient reward even if, in the eyes of the agency, the quality of the students' service is minimal. In the case of service learning for academic credit, campus faculty will be more interested in fact-based knowledge acquired as a result of the service experience rather than in the quality of the service provided. However, in attempting to develop a strong relationship between community and campus this one-sided approach will only lead to resentment by the agency of the campus' service program.

What Responsibility Does the Community Have to the Campus? Of course, the host-community organization will need to determine the actual contributions made by student volunteers in terms of service provided or problems solved. While they will understand the growth and development of volunteers as important, their assessment and evaluation will tend to focus more on the work accomplished, the need for which brought them into the service-learning relationship in the first place. Conversely, if the agency has a biased approach to assessment, this may lead to dissatisfaction on the part of the campus.

In similar fashion, the assessment process can be used by campus and community agency staff to evaluate their inter-program relationship over the long term. Is the campus observing anticipated benefits in its students? Are agency needs being met by student volunteers in a cost-effective way?

An example of this type of mutually beneficial relationship between the campus and community is a program where Georgetown University students staff the Calvary Shelter for homeless women at least three nights per week. Originally, Georgetown's intent was to allow students to work directly with homeless people, to have them develop a sense of responsibility, and to teach them how to cope with a variety of different situations. However, the experience of staffing the Shelter has touched students in a deeper way as they frequently give more hours than required, explore careers in social service and policy change, and sponsor educational programs on homeless issues on campus. In fact, many Georgetown alumni have gone on to staff the Shelter as professionals and serve on its board of directors.

If a service-learning program is perceived as a collaborative enterprise, then problems in the relationship will be mutually owned with both parties equally intent on finding solutions. Both parties need to take time to check with each other on a regular basis to monitor the partnership, and if needed, find ways to improve it. A mechanism for

organizing this evaluation can be a faculty, student, and community advisory council, which might be charged with monitoring a service-learning program, providing a forum for expressing concerns, and developing new program models.

Establishing a Climate of Support

It is important to acknowledge that engaging in a partnership that supports student-service learning is probably not the first priority for either the campus or the community organization. Service learning for students is not the primary purpose of most educational institutions; nor is it the primary purpose of most human-service organizations. Unfortunately, the agency volunteer coordinators and the campus community-service staff are usually marginal to the main goals of their institutions and organizations. Thus, in order to function effectively with and on behalf of each other, they need to work together to support and affirm their relationship. To facilitate this, the following questions need to be addressed:

Why Build an Ethos for Service Learning? The campus programs that survive are those that build service learning into the mission and curricula of their institutions. If service learning is not clearly expressed as part of the institutional mission, it will not get sustained support from the faculty, trustees, community, or students. The program will get lost in the shuffle of extracurricular activities competing for students' time. Support on campus means that an ethos of service permeates the life of the school—from the mission statement to the spirit of community that grows from living out the mission. It will be expressed in public-relations materials and through adequate budgets for service programs.

Support off-campus means that student volunteers and those with whom they work are recognized and valued both inside the host-community organization and in the community at large. Community agency staff and their campus partners must work together to be sure that the off-campus community is aware of the contributions made by student volunteers. In turn, it is also important for the wider community to appreciate the work of community agencies in hosting and supervising student volunteers.

Why Is Recognition Important? Supportive partners deserve recognition. Part of the challenge of developing a climate of support for service learning depends on the ability of the community and campus to find ways to express recognition for their mutual accomplishments. By getting public recognition in the news media, obtaining student and agency recognition on campus, writing thank-you letters to an agency's board of directors, and other means, the collaborative relationship is supported, nurtured, and recognized.

Birmingham Southern College in Alabama has developed an ongoing recognition program that goes beyond the usual annual awards banquet. Staff from community agencies audit college courses, faculty conduct "Lunch and Learn" seminars by lecturing on topics of interest at local community agencies, and the campus hosts an "executive in residence" who has freedom to research, lecture, and become rejuvenated from the daily grind of agency work. In this way, the campus maximizes its resources by recognizing agency contributions in a meaningful and mutually growth-enhancing way.

Conclusion

In addition to designing, implementing and evaluating a service relationship between a campus program and a community organization, involved staff must be aware of the need constantly to build a climate of support from the community in addition to support from the campus for service learning. Without support from the educational institution and support from the agency and larger community, the partnership may not survive. Utilizing the Service Learning Model can be one of the first tools used by students, faculty, and agency staff to establish a common language and to develop an understanding of the special needs and strengths of college students in providing community service.

Quality service-learning programs do not just happen by sending students out to community agencies and hoping that they learn something. A true partnership between the campus and the community takes time, people, and a commitment to develop the relationship and make it work. It is through such partnerships that the campus and community can truly join forces to create a collaborative and compassionate society.

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Through university and college case studies, the Service Learning Model is illustrated by outlining characteristics of each phase, as well as by discussing problems and potential for change inherent in each institution's circumstances.

Transforming the University Through Service Learning

Sharon G. Rubin

How do we think about colleges and universities? We describe them as ivory towers; we sing about ivy-covered walls. Whether a campus has arched entrances with wrought-iron gates or merely a major U.S. highway to provide a boundary, most of us take pleasure in seeing our campuses as havens, set apart from society's problems, and offering time and space for contemplation and scholarship. The college that springs to mind as our ideal may have red brick buildings with white pillars or Gothic stained glass, but it is a restricted community of teachers and learners, not an open community responsive to social problems.

Of course, many of us would argue that despite their separateness, our campuses are indeed involved in the life of the larger community. After all, the mission statement of almost every college in the country advocates the ideal of good citizenship for students, to say nothing of concern for others. Consequently, students perform internships, participate in cooperative education, and are involved in service projects. Government and foundation grants, institutes, and think tanks give faculty a chance to use their expertise to grapple with important social problems. Local residents who attend campus events are welcomed. However, the tension between the campus as a protected environment and the campus as an active participant in the "real world" is unlikely to disappear. The issue then becomes not whether the campus and the community can be related so inextricably that the boundary between them dissolves, but where that boundary should be.

In thinking about how to determine where that boundary is on our own campuses, and to judge where that boundary belongs, the same sort