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Engaging the Campus in Service to the Community

If physical location makes a metropolitan university, then Oxford and Cambridge universities should be described as metropolitan universities. Oxford, particularly, is in the heart of an urban metropolis. Yet we would be hard put to grant either one that entitlement.

What makes a metropolitan university, surely, is its organic connection with an urban community. That community need not be right outside the gates. Our own campus is located in a quasi-sylvan setting, surrounded by suburbia, yet we would argue that it is indeed a metropolitan university in the most meaningful sense, because its educational program is significantly involved, through service learning, with the nearby urban community of Baltimore. That involvement needs to be deepened and expanded, but it is already well established, and strong enough even to withstand the budgetary storms that rage around public higher education.

This article is about how one builds the connection between the university and the urban community by means of a service-learning program, and it draws, necessarily, on the experience of The Shriver Center at the Baltimore County campus of the University of Maryland (UMBC).

Form and Function

Service learning is defined and described throughout this issue of *Metropolitan Universities*. To very briefly recapitulate, two essential elements of service learning are opportunity (while enrolled in a program of higher education) to engage in an activity that is designed and conducted primarily to contribute to a community outside the academy, interspersed with the opportunity to reflect on that service experience in an academic setting. By serving in the community, the student learns from experience both about the nature and the limitations of community and about the satisfactions and frustrations of service. By taking that experience back into the classroom, the student objectifies the service experience. What has been rooted in learning by doing can flower into the discovery of principles for application in later life. Service connects the student to the community in a more fundamental way than reading or classroom participation—even in interactive seminars—can possibly do. Returning to the classroom, along with the library, builds the connection to other communities, present and future, actual and virtual. Indeed, when properly executed, service learning has the potential to become an essential element in a liberal education, providing opportunities for the interaction of theory and practice just as medical and legal internships have done for the professions.

Further, service learning builds connections between the educational process and preparation for citizenship in a democracy. By exposing students to opportunities to participate in building community at the local level, and then bringing them back to the classroom to reflect on what they have learned about the community building process, students are sensitized to the positive values of active citizenship. As Marian Wright Edelman, president of The Children's Defense Fund, has pointed out, "Democracy is not a spectator sport."

Building these connections requires an institution created within the framework of the academy, but independent and strong enough to pursue an idea that has traditionally been ignored, or perhaps subtly disfavored, within academia, and to pursue it to the point where it becomes an integral part of the academic program.

There is an ancient and honorable tradition in many colleges and universities of service to the local community, particularly to the disadvantaged within that community. Phillips Brooks House at Harvard and Dwight Hall at Yale, both created in the nineteenth century as religious models, are perhaps the

best known examples of this kind of institution within a university community. Paradoxically, that tradition may have inhibited the development of service-learning programs because it separated the good works that it fostered from academic work, and thereby separated service from learning. There was no attempt, among the institutions created within that tradition, to relate the service experience to what went on in the classroom, or even to send the student participant into the library to find materials through which they might reflect on their experience. Thus, in developing a true service-learning program, it may make more sense to begin with a new entity devoted to that purpose, rather than try to build on an established community service or volunteering program without any academic component.

There are at least three other traditional streams of development in service activities that need to be sorted out here, using the word “service” in its broadest sense, to include any activities of students contributing the present value of their labor to society, compensated or uncompensated, with or without educational value to the students.

- Many students (undergraduate, graduate, and professional) find that part-time employment is necessary to support themselves while in school. Some (too many) even work full-time while enrolled full-time in an academic program. Unfortunately, more remunerative work is likely to be unrelated to their studies, except for the work of mid-career professionals, and may involve service only in the sense that someone, an employer, customer, or client, is willing to pay for services rendered.

- Almost all academic institutions supplement scholarships, loans, and grants with work-study programs that supply needed labor for the institution while helping to support needy students. Some of the work may have educational value, but that value is seldom exploited in the classroom. An obvious exception would be teaching and research fellowships for graduate students, but these exist within the walls of the academy, as, in effect, a special form of service learning, outside the scope of our consideration here.

- Some instructional programs, particularly professional and pre-professional programs, include periods of apprenticeship interspersed with classroom work. These are sometimes designated as co-op programs, and ordinarily involve gainful employment in the business or professional world.

Each of these activities contributes something of value to the academic enterprise. At the same time, however, they shall be distinguished from service learning. This is not to say that the same entity within the academic

institution that manages a service-learning program may not be able to administer these other programs as well. In fact, they may provide useful ballast or even synergy to the administrative structure of an entity designed primarily to develop a service-learning program. The question to be weighed in each instance is whether the other programs add more than they take away from the ability to integrate service learning into the academic program. Academically based co-op and internship programs form a useful base on which to build service learning because, unlike the traditional volunteer social service programs that preceded the introduction of service learning they fall on the right side of the old curricular/extracurricular divide—however artificial that divide may have become (Martello and Price, this issue). These programs are seen as recognizable elements of the curriculum, validated by some form of academic credit. More importantly, work-based learning programs provide students with strategies for translating the ethic of service into their life's work.

Designing the administrative structure for a service-learning program in a metropolitan setting will be very much a matter of adapting the structure to the needs of both the institution and the community. What is perhaps most important is the creation of appropriate advisory committees on both the academic and the community sides. Nor is it enough to create strong representative committees; they must both be fully involved in the planning and operation of the program.

Faculty Involvement

Putting aside for the moment the issue of organizational structure for the service-learning entity, we turn to the question of faculty involvement, which is absolutely critical to the viability of the enterprise. Since curriculum is first and foremost the property of the institution's faculty, faculty must take ownership of service learning from the outset if it is to succeed. Achieving faculty ownership is a daunting task, but it is an exciting one as well. The opportunities are limited only by the scope of the imagination.

The professional schools have already achieved much of the promise of service learning. No self-respecting law school these days is without its clinical program, where the legal problems of the local community, from landlord-tenant cases to class action cases involving the structure of the public school system, are the grist of student practice and analytical study. Even in medical schools, where the surgeons and the subspecialists are still kings

(and royalty is rarely female), service in a community clinic is increasingly a regular part of the medical student's training. For nurses it is taken for granted.

At the undergraduate level, the social sciences present the most obvious openings for service learning. Political scientists can involve their students in the processes of local government in both official and informal structures. Economists can initiate their students into the mysteries of budget making, and budget deconstruction. Sociologists, psychologists, and social work faculty can guide their students in examining and attempting to remediate dysfunctional social organisms and relationships in the community. But these opportunities only rise to the status of service learning when, in the learning process, and integral to that process, the student performs a service—that is, he/she responds to human and environmental needs—and works with a community to build capacity and mutually beneficial relationships.

In this effort, history is often the bridge between the social sciences and the humanities. In order to understand current community problems, students must be instructed in how to research and draw on history and other sources in the community not yet collected in any library. Again, to qualify as service learning, the research must involve the community as an active participant.

Reading and writing are skills that students can help to enhance when local schools have failed or fallen short, and faculty—in fields ranging from literature to English as a second language—can mentor the student mentors. But students will experience their mentoring as service learning only when they discover, as did the tutor Anna in “The King and I,” that “by my students I am taught.”

The opportunities for service learning in science and engineering are only slightly less evident. Environmental issues mix biology, chemistry, and engineering with economics, politics, and sociology. Science-based industry can itself be a source of community problems (and opportunities) that can, in turn, be properly analyzed and attacked only with help from science, social science, and the humanities, and students from virtually any discipline can combine their individual talents to focus on human problems—such as literacy, homelessness, or mental retardation—that cross disciplinary lines.

There is another line that a service-learning program cannot cross, however, without losing its identity as service learning. If it becomes institutionalized and professionalized, as with nursing or social service, somewhere along the way it loses its voluntary character, and reverts to a purely profes-

sional activity. This is not a bad thing, and professionals can still be volunteers. But the voluntary quality of service learning is special, and senior academic administrators, presidents, and provosts should make special efforts to protect the integrity of service-learning programs, for funding as well as for moral support—a responsibility they cannot delegate to deans and department chairs.

The confluence of disciplines can attract a cluster of faculty. But it raises another problem for faculty involvement in service learning. The focus of faculty attention, and the building block of faculty power in American higher education, is the academic department. When an activity cuts across departmental lines, it raises hackles among entrenched academic leadership. No matter that some of the most creative work in scholarship and teaching is being done at the margins or the intersections of hitherto separate disciplines, whether in biochemistry, political economy, or mind/brain research. There is inherent resistance in the departmental structure that can weaken a fledgling service-learning program if it is seen, however mistakenly, as somehow destructive of disciplines, and therefore of departmental integrity.

The risks, particularly for younger, untenured faculty, in participating in service-learning programs are not inconsiderable. Junior faculty seeking tenure are well advised to concentrate their energies towards the traditional core of their disciplines. To venture outside departmental boundaries is to risk disapprobation or, almost equally dangerous, indifference from their senior colleagues when their futures are being decided. Again, senior administrators, and especially chief academic officers, may need to take some of these young pioneers under their wings. And when this kind of intervention is necessary, fundamental questions may be raised about the locus of tenure (Yarmolinsky, 1996).

Quite apart from the risks for individual faculty members, there is a different kind of risk in that service-learning programs may be identified with faculty members who are regarded by their colleagues as somehow out of the main stream. Forty years ago David Riesman, perhaps the most imaginative sociologist of higher education, identified two kinds of academics: the cosmopolitans, who found their career satisfaction in an international community of scholars organized around their disciplines or subdisciplines, and the home guard, who got their satisfaction from the geographical community in which they lived and worked. In a college town, he observed, they might even belong to the Rotary Club (Riesman, 1958).

It would be unfortunate for both the university and the urban community if faculty involved in a service-learning program in a metropolitan university were identified as members of Riesman's home guard. Rather, they should be recruited from among faculty leaders in innovative scholarship who can bridge the gap—or the chasm—between thought and action, who can rise above any lingering distinctions between cosmopolitans and home guards, and who—to the extent the distinction still exists—are respected by both factions.

Equally critical is the recruitment of community leaders who can facilitate a service-learning program in the metropolitan community. Ideally, those leaders should be a combination of Mother Teresa and Saul Alinsky. If they do not begin as Teresa/Alinsky combination might, with an instinctive appreciation of the synergy between service and learning, then they need to grasp and embrace that synergy in order to prevent the program from degeneration into routine tasks for volunteers, or evaporation into field trips for curious students.

Evaluation is a special problem for service-learning programs, because such programs must be evaluated on two criteria, and by two different kinds of evaluators. The learning component must be evaluated by faculty peers, and the service component by the community being served. But the faculty evaluators must be open-minded and broad-gauged enough to appreciate the value of learning that almost inevitably cuts across disciplinary lines, while the community evaluators must be patient enough to appreciate the need for the educational component, even if it takes resources and energies from the immediate service benefits.

Engaged Scholarship

What is needed here is a broadening of the meaning of scholarship, as initially proposed in the recent Carnegie report, *Scholarship Reconsidered*. That is, we must value the integration, communication, and application of knowledge as necessary concomitants to the discovery of knowledge by itself. Service learning can connect theory to practice, and thought to action, and therefore is worthy of at least equal status with other, more traditional forms of scholarly enterprise.

A final challenge lies in developing strategies for applying the traditional campus missions of teaching, scholarship, and service to the most urgent problems facing society today. If the academy is to achieve its fullest poten-

tial as an intellectual resource for society, we must respond by creatively attacking and helping to solve urgent social problems in an intentional way. We must develop, in form and function, new prototypes for institutions that promote connected, engaged scholarship. In order for undergraduates and faculty to come into contact with real life problems, classrooms and laboratories must be extended to include, for example, clinics, youth centers, and local government offices. At The Shriver Center, we have successfully created and now operate youth service programs that function not only as models of effective service delivery, but as real life laboratories that provide a context in which students, faculty, and community members can interact in meaningful ways.

In his landmark article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* entitled "Creating the New American College," Ernest Boyer called for creation of a new institution of higher learning that would link higher education with urban renewal. The Shriver Center is one of the few institutions attempting to implement Boyer's vision in a practical way. Service learning, faculty engagement, and reconsideration of the meaning of scholarship are crucial to meeting this challenge.