

The theme of “international service learning” may seem surprising to some readers. After all, metropolitan universities often cite the “local” character of their student body as a quality that distinguishes them from institutions that draw students from national or international pools. Most metropolitan universities find that nearly 80 percent of their students come from the immediate vicinity of the campus. Even more noteworthy is the concentration of alumni, who tend to remain in the region.

Our urban and metropolitan institutions, serving a largely local student body, offer a college experience whose impact has a dramatic effect on the region’s future. Simply said, our thousands of graduates represent a significant core of the region’s future citizens. When assessing our curricula and teaching/learning strategies, we should be asking ourselves, “What kind of graduates are we producing? How will they shape this region? What will the region’s social, cultural, and economic fabric require of them to create and sustain a high quality of life for all?”

Is it really important that we, as metropolitan universities, challenge students to understand their role in community? After all, our students are busy people with many competing demands on their time. Consider the 1999 survey of entering freshmen conducted through the UCLA Cooperative Institutional Research Program (Sax et al., 1999). The findings show that the number of students who believe it is important for them to participate in community action programs has fallen to its lowest level in more than a decade. Similar decreases were reported in factors related to helping others, caring for the environment, acting as a community leader, and promoting racial understanding. Given the strained fabric of many urban regions, these statistics must be a call-to-action for institutions to promote citizenship among graduates. Boyer wrote that “students should make a connection between what they learn and how they live” (1990, p. 54). Our students may come to us with a career orientation, but do we not have an obligation, even a vested interest, in promoting their understanding of their role in community life?

For many institutions, part of the response to this need for civic education has been to offer opportunities to engage in a variety of community-based learning experiences, such as internships, practica, cooperative learning, service learning courses, and co-curricular volunteer activities. To date, most community-based learning has focused on two main objectives:

- enhanced learning of content through applied experiences, and
- enhancement of students’ sense of civic responsibility through community-based action.

Through community-based educational experiences, college curricula can help prepare students to build successful careers, families, and lives, but also to build strong communities through personal involvement.

In the growing body of literature on service learning in American higher education, these two objectives have been paramount, but undeniably the context has been primarily local. In other words, most proponents of civic education and applied learning draw almost exclusively on American economic, social, and cultural challenges, and on the American democratic ideal as their framework for motivation and action.

Frequently cited papers that call institutions to attend to the importance of civic education also tend to have a strong national focus and to define civic as mostly local. For example, the "Wingspread Declaration on Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University," and the "Presidents' Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education," (both 1999 publications of Campus Compact) point to the deteriorating condition of American democracy and declining rates of political participation as a central argument for civic education. There can be no doubt that our community fabric is in poor condition, and that education, in the Jeffersonian and Hamiltonian view, is a tool for building a democratic society. Much of the passion behind the current service learning movement is aimed at addressing critical issues in U.S. communities, and who could say those issues are not compelling and urgent? Our communities face enormous challenges.

However, here's an interesting additional twist on the issues of community-based learning, education for citizenship, and social responsibility: our students may come from, and tend to remain in, the metropolitan area, but those cities and their economies are dramatically influenced by extensive and complex global relationships. Through the articles in this issue of the journal, our guest editors, David Hartman and Bill Roberts, explore the important learning linkages between local and international community issues. They show us that giving students opportunities to explore the place they hold in an interconnected global society helps them understand their own communities and enhances their own lives as citizens.

Recently, an alumnus of Northern Kentucky University told the story of her own revelation about the global nature of local life. Typical of NKU graduates, she intends to live out her life and career in this area where she grew up. After some months in her first postgraduate job, she was congratulated for her excellent performance and told that her promotional opportunity would involve working with vendor partners in several Asian countries. She found herself scrambling to learn about geography, language, and cultures: "I never dreamed I would need to understand international information while working here in Cincinnati!" Similarly, a corporate leader, when asked what graduates should know to be successful in the current economy, replied, "They should be able to write a letter that can cross multiple nations and cultures, and offends no one."

Equally important is understanding that the world has common interests in basic quality of life issues. Our individual futures will be shaped by worldwide actions on the environment, health, communications, and by societal and political actions, all of which can be influenced by collaborative attention to the role of knowledge and education. William Plater writes compellingly of the growing impact of globalization on students' learning experiences. He reminds us that, through cooperation, competition, and dissemination of knowledge, teaching and research have always been a worldwide

enterprise. He suggests that our faculty and students would also benefit from global partnerships in public service, community-building, and civic action.

“Why not service? Is citizenship only local?...Using the rapidly expanding capacities of digital communication, there is no reason not to share curricula, faculty, students, information, interests, assessment, and even values across political and geographic boundaries. To be a citizen of Indianapolis or Seattle or Miami without also being involved with citizens of Islamabad, Santiago, or Moscow may be increasingly problematic” (1999, pp. 149-150).

The “local” emphasis of education is appropriate, but perhaps, because of these more complex worldwide connections, cannot be seen as an exclusive goal. Global relationships and issues increasingly transcend national and state boundaries. Topics such as global climate change, pollution, sustainable access to technology, digital networks, and multi-national trading/manufacturing partnerships often give international dimensions to critical local issues. Because knowledge and educational access are at the core of these issues, dealing with these problems calls more strongly on educational relationships than governmental ones. Universities are challenged to learn to operate within a global marketplace while also maintaining local identities. This suggests the growth of hybrid institutions and hybrid learning experiences in which students, faculty, and institutions engage in joint enterprises with other organizations to explore shared interests and needs (Scott, 1999).

This issue of *Metropolitan Universities* features articles by faculty and students who have engaged in international service learning activities to promote applied learning, student growth and development, and knowledge exchange across national boundaries. The articles are compelling, and sometimes disturbing, in their exploration of the real benefits and risks of international learning. This is complex work that requires institutional support for the faculty who take leadership responsibilities for international partnerships. The importance of careful planning and management of these learning experiences is a central topic. The authors remind us that while learning and studying in international settings can be risky, the experience is strengthened and success is enhanced if educational purposes are clear, and supported through communications, detailed orientation of students, and the careful cultivation of formal partnerships between participants. Just as in the U.S., the involvement of our students in international service learning is not about “helping unfortunates” or studying others as a laboratory experiment, but is about shared learning and knowledge exchanges between citizens who face common global and local issues.

Other new resources are emerging to assist institutions in planning and supporting this new, interactive view of international study in which nations, communities, citizens, and educators work together in common purpose. The American Council on Education launched a new initiative in May 2000 that focuses on the internationalization of the undergraduate experience (see <<http://www.acenet.edu/hena/home.html>>). The International Partnership for Service-Learning has prepared a report on “Service-Learning in Higher Education Around the World: An Initial Look” (see <

www.ipsl.org>) that reminds us that other nations have also developed service learning programs, for a variety of purposes, and some have more experience than we at building the connection between education and democratic practice.

Of particular value in this issue's articles are reminders that faculty and students find a new level of love for learning in the application of knowledge through direct experience. Faculty can find career renewal and satisfaction through the linkage of personal values and professional work that is inherent in service learning. Students who may never even have imagined having an international experience gain a lasting and dynamic understanding of the place of their city in the world context. In addition, they make significant gains in personal development, confidence, responsibility, and empathy. Several authors also comment on how student teams, returning from international experiences, have a positive impact on multicultural awareness on campus.

Because our campuses serve students who tend to be place-bound and likely are first-generation college students, and because our cities are affected by complex global relationships, our metropolitan universities must explore the role of international learning and partnerships. When we think of ourselves as universities with a mission that emphasizes the role of service and engagement, we need to remember that the exploration and fulfillment of that mission has both local and international dimensions.

Suggested Readings:

Boyer, E. L., *Campus Life: In Search of Community* (Princeton: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990).

Boyte, H., and E. Hollander, "Wingspread Declaration on Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University" (Providence, RI: Campus Compact, 1999).

Campus Compact, "Presidents' Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education," (Providence, RI: author, 1999).

Plater, W. M., "Habits of Living: Engaging the Campus as Citizen One Scholar at a Time." In *Colleges and Universities as Citizens*, R. G. Bringle, R. Games, and E. A. Malloy, eds. (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1999).

Sax, L. J., A. W. Astin, W. S. Korn, and K. M. Mahoney, "The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1999" (Los Angeles: UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, 1999).

Scott, P., "The Globalization of Higher Education." In *Globalization and the University*, published by the Salzburg Seminar, Universities Project, 2 Maple Street, Middlebury, VT 05753.