Service Learning: Challenges and Opportunities

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Introduction

According to Boyer (1994), the mission of American higher education has been "inextricably intertwined" with the civic mission of the country since the founding of Harvard in 1637. Rudolph (1968) cites the development of an informed citizenry as one of the main reasons for establishing colonial colleges. While the proliferation of colleges in colonial times reflected provincial rivalry and missionary zeal, some historians suggest that it was actually the desire to influence social and political life that motivated the founders of the earliest colleges (Power, 1958).

After the American Revolution, both public and private colleges assumed a critical role in shaping the nation (Boyer, 1994).The purpose of establishing land grant colleges was tied with community needs. In addition, colleges and universities have traditionally served as the social conscience of the nation, advocating for the abolition of slavery, promoting women's rights and civil rights, challenging involvement in the Vietnam War, and raising other social and ethical concerns (Boyer & Hechinger, 1981; Lucas, 1994; Zlotkowski, 1996). Despite this tradition, some fear that colleges and universities have drifted away from their civic mission (Ansley & Gaventa, 1997; Boyer, 1987, 1990, 1994; Boyte & Hollander, 1999; Checkoway, 2001; Gabelnick, 1997; Gamson, 1997; Lucas, 1994; Wallace, 2000).

One of the main reasons given for the perceived drift is the preoccupation with issues of standardization and accreditation in the latter half of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries (Boyer, 1990). Checkoway (2001) and Lucas (1994) suggest that as professionalization and departmentalization grew, disciplinary allegiance and investment in academic societies overshadowed the civic mission of higher education. Calls for change have accompanied this concern for the lack of focus on the civic mission.

In 1950, the Truman Commission, convened to study and define the purpose of higher education, declared that "higher education should help students acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable them to live rightly and willfully in a free society and that without a broad liberal education, citizens are denied the opportunity to engage in the principal ideas and events that are the source of any civilization" (Hinck & Brandell, 2000, p. 869). More recently, the Wingspread Conference challenged research universities to move beyond intellectual separation, individualism and elitism and to engage more fully in reflection and service for the public good (Boyte & Hollander, 1999).

Today, the mission statements of most colleges and universities reveal a commitment to service and civic engagement, yet the reality does not always match the rhetoric (Boyer, 1994). In the words of Boyer (1994), higher education is perceived as a "private benefit, not a public good." Those who advocate for a renewed commitment to the civic mission of colleges and universities identify three main strategies for achieving this goal: a rigorous focus on education in democratic values and citizenship, formation of collaborative community-university partnerships, and promotion of service learning.

Gabelnick (1997) describes several curricular models which facilitate education in democratic values. Mendel-Reyes (1998) offers another example of democratic education. An excellent example of community-university partnerships is available on-line through the Duke University website at

http://community.duke.edu/mission.htm. An in-depth description of each of these strategies is beyond the scope of this paper. According to Campus Compact (1999, 2002), questions relative to the civic mission of higher education intersect in the concept of service learning. Therefore, this paper will focus on service learning. The paper will trace the history of service learning and explain how it differs from other forms of service. The paper will then define service learning and the elements most often associated with it. The paper will identify strategies for institutionalizing service learning within higher education. Finally, the paper will use the writings of Morgan (1997) to identify metaphors which might describe the type organizations which would be most open to the institutionalization of service learning.

Several of the articles referenced within the paper contain descriptions of service learning projects. A representative sampling of service learning projects in colleges and universities throughout the country may be found in Service Matters (Campus Compact, 1999).

The History of Service Learning

Speck (2001) associates the concept of service learning with the Progressive era and the work of Jane Addams, John Dewey, and Dorothy Day. However, according to Speck, the word service learning appeared only sporadically in the literature until the latter part of the 1990's.

In an interview with Ted Marchese in the March 1997 Bulletin of the American Association for Higher Education, Bringle states that the term service learning dates back to 1950 and that it was used to describe projects linking college students with senior citizens in the 1980's. Several writers connect service learning with the involvement of college students in the social and political controversies of the 1960's and 1970's. Several professional organizations are closely connected with the history of service learning. Either directly or indirectly these organizations facilitated an understanding of service learning and contributed to its development. Founded in 1971, the National Society for Experiential Education is often credited with promoting service learning as a distinct educational process. The Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL) was founded in 1984 by college students to challenge the common perception that young adults were self-seeking and out of touch with social issues. COOL focuses on service as a means to unite students of all backgrounds to participate actively in their communities and become actively engaged in the process of building a more just society (http://www.cool2serve.org/).

A similar desire to counter the media image of college students as materialistic and self-absorbed, led the Presidents of Brown, Georgetown, and Stanford universities, and the president of the Education Commission of the States, to establish Campus Compact in 1985 (Campus Compact, 2002). A national coalition of college and university presidents, Campus Compact embraces service learning as a primary strategy for advancing its mission in support of the civic purposes of higher education. Today, the presidents of 763 two- and four- year, private and public colleges and universities in 46 states and the District of Columbia are members of Campus Compact. Educators for Community Engagement (ECE), formerly known as the Invisible College, emerged in 1994 as a vehicle for higher education faculty members to explore issues related to service learning, in particular issues of pedagogy and responsible community relationships (http://www.e4ece.org).

The development of a series on service learning in the disciplines has been a primary focus of Educators for Community Engagement since its foundation. With initial funding from Campus Compact, ECE partnered with the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) to publish the series in 1997-1998. The purpose of this series is directly aligned with efforts to ensure the

academic rigor of service learning as a pedagogy grounded in theory, research and discipline-specific scholarship (Zlotkowski, 1996).

The Point of Difference in Service Learning

Before defining service learning as it is used in this paper, it is necessary to distinguish it from other forms of cocurricular and extracurricular service. O'Byrne (2001) notes that one of the greatest challenges to the acceptance and implementation of service learning is the perception that service learning is synonymous with other community-based learning activities, such as volunteerism, internships, practica and fieldwork. Although these activities are valuable, they lack the link with curriculum that is essential to service learning. Furco (1996), Marullo and Edwards (2000), and Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2000) emphasize that true service learning, as distinct from other forms of service, is also distinguished by the need for mutuality and reciprocity between campus and community. Both the provider and the recipient of the service share in the identification of need, and both benefit from the service. Acknowledging that theirs is a value-laden position, Marullo and Edwards (2000) add that service learning which seeks to socialize students to understand the nature of the problems they seek to address and which engages them in appropriate service strategies has the potential for transforming society (p. 900).

Service Learning Defined

Definitions for service learning are numerous. Campus Compact (2001) defines service learning as "an educational methodology which combines community service with academic learning objectives, preparation for community work, and deliberate reflection" (p.v). In the Introduction to Service Learning Toolkit Campus Compact (2000) enumerates representative definitions from several organizations and respected individuals in the field of service learning.

From the American Association for Higher Education, Campus Compact offers the definition: "Service learning means a method under which students learn and develop through thoughtfully organized service that: is conducted in and meets the needs of a community and is coordinated with an institution of higher education, and with the community; helps foster civic responsibility; is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students enrolled; and includes structured time for students to reflect on the service experience"(p. 15).

Campus Compact also offers the following definition from Thomas Ehrlich, former board member of the Corporation for National and Community Service and former chair of the Campus Compact Executive Committee: "Service learning is the various pedagogies that link community service and academic study so that each strengthens the other. The basic theory of service learning is Dewey's: the interaction of knowledge and skills with experience is key to learning" (p.16). From Bringle and Hatcher, Campus Compact cites: "Service learning is a credit-bearing, educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility" (p. 17). Mendel-Reyes (1998) further nuances service learning as a "pedagogy for citizenship [which] integrates the academic study of democracy and the experience of democratic community service" (p. 34).

According to Weigert (1998), six elements differentiate and characterize service learning. Three of these elements focus on the community: (1) the service is meaningful to the community; (2) the

service meets a need or goal; and (3) the community defines the need or goal. The other three elements focus on the campus (1) the service flows from and into course objectives; (2) assignments requiring reflection integrate the service with course objectives; and (3) the assignment is assessed and evaluated.

Howard (1998) identifies service learning as a counternormative pedagogy, characterized by four essential components. He insists that service learning is primarily a teaching methodology. It is also, according to his definition, an intentional effort to bring together community and campus. It integrates experiential and academic learning in a mutually strengthening manner. In addition, true service learning is relevant to the academic course of study. Zlotkowski (1996) agrees with this focus on learning in service learning, characterizing it as the work of "socially, morally, and pedagogically concerned academicians" rather than that of "socially and morally concerned activists operating from an academic base" (p. 25).

Institutionalizing Service Learning

Despite the phenomenal growth in membership in Campus Compact, the increase in writing on the topic, and the increased involvement of faculty in service learning, Zlotkowski (1996) asserts that there is a need to connect service learning more closely with the "defining constructs of academic life"(p. 23). Bringle, Games, Foos, Osgood, and Osborne (2000) agree that service learning often remains on the periphery of higher education. O'Byrne (2001) advises that, to be effective, service learning must be embedded into the college or university; a service ethic must be perceived as part of the identity of an educated person. In other words, service learning must become institutionalized within higher education.

A review of several articles related to the institutionalization of service learning (Ansley & Gaventa, 1997; Boyte & Hollander, 1999; Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Checkoway, 2001; Furco, 1996, 2002; Gabelnick, 1997; Hinck & Brandell, 2000; Schneider, 1998/1999; Ward, 1998; Zlotkowski, 1996, 1998) suggests six areas for consideration: (1) connection with institutional mission and vision; (2) administrative leadership; (3) central coordination; (4) faculty support and involvement; (5) student ownership; and (6) formation of community partnerships. Each of these areas will be considered briefly.

Institutional Mission and Vision

Hinck and Brandell (2000) state the need for institutional clarity and agreement on the definition of service learning. As previously stated, there are a number of accepted definitions. However, within the same institution there is a need to explore and subscribe to a definition that enables all to speak the same language.

Based on a review of best practices related to service learning, Schneider (1998/1999) states the importance of congruence between the mission and vision for service learning and the overall mission and vision of the institution. Furco (2001) suggests that service learning be used as a vehicle for promoting institutional strategic goals.

Administrative Leadership

Campus Compact (1995, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002) insists upon the need for presidential leadership, active support and involvement. Hinck and Brandell (2000) advise that support must be

demonstrated in actions, not merely in words. Ward (1998) states a basic need for administrators at all levels within higher education to become thoroughly familiar with service learning and to support an "ethos of learning" which incorporates community service.

Threaded throughout the literature is a basic agreement on the need for administrative leadership in translating a commitment to service learning into creation and maintenance of the necessary campus infrastructure: staffing an office, supporting and funding faculty participation, communicating with trustees, publicizing initiatives within the institution and with external publics, and supporting the creation of academic policies which support service learning. In addition to presidential leadership, Ward (1998) and O'Byrne (2001) state the need for deans and department heads to articulate and support service learning as appropriate within their academic divisions. O'Byrne (1998) also suggests the importance of the faculty senate, in its role of shared leadership with administration, in promoting acceptance of service learning within colleges and universities.

Central Coordination

Although the coordination of service learning differs across institutions, research by Hinck and Brandell (2000) suggests that the institutionalization of service learning is facilitated by an adequately staffed and funded central office, preferably within the division of academic affairs. Campus Compact (1999) advocates for the inclusion of the service learning coordinator on the institution's strategic planning committee. Several writers mention the importance of showcasing the activities of the service learning office through internal and external communications and publications.

Faculty Support

Furco (2001) reports that a University of California-Berkeley Study found that the "strongest predictor for institutionalizing service learning on college campuses is faculty involvement in and support for service-learning" (p. 69). Zlotkowski (1996, 1998, 2001) supports this conclusion and places particular emphasis on the need to view service learning as an effective pedagogy. Other writers agree.

Checkoway (2001) contends that there is a growing concern that academically based knowledge alone cannot prepare students to confront 21st century issues. Howard (1998) cites the results of several studies which conclude that college students are disengaged from teacher directed lectures 40% of the time and remember and retain less than 20% of what is heard in traditional classes. In light of such concerns, many educators are revisiting relational forms of education and Dewey-like "learning by doing" approaches as viable alternatives to traditional classroom instruction (Checkoway, 2001; Halliburton, 1997). According to Zlotkowski (1996), the possibilities for service learning as a valuable methodology for improving learning led to the development of the AAHE monograph series on Service Learning in the Disciplines. Zlotkowski also asserts the importance of faculty publication on the topic of service learning in discipline-specific professional journals. For service learning to be effective, Furco (2001) and Gabelnick (1997) highlight the need for faculty to relinquish their role as "experts" and to move toward a more collaborative style of teaching which recognizes the significant contributions of students and community members in the teaching-learning process. Finally, all literature reviewed emphasized the need to modify policies and procedures which determine criteria for retention, promotion and tenure in order to reward and

compensate faculty who invest the considerable time required for research and service related to service learning.

Student Ownership

According to Schneider (1998/1999), students play an integral role in service learning. Her review of best practices revealed that on campuses where service learning flourished, students were involved in publicizing service learning opportunities and often in designing service learning courses, options and activities. Furco's Self-Assessment Rubric for the Institutionalization of Service Learning in Higher Education (2002) highlights the importance of student awareness, opportunities, leadership, and incentives and rewards in moving a campus toward what he terms "sustained institutionalization."

Community Partnerships

Rubin (2001) wisely asserts that both universities and communities have their own cultures and agenda which need to be honored and respected. Creating and sustaining partnerships requires that universities and communities identify the places where their goals intersect and seek collaborations which will be mutually beneficial. Such a quest involves a change in the mindset which believes that universities have answers and communities provide sites for service and subjects for research (Bailis, 2001). Creating effective community-university partnerships also requires that universities acknowledge that communities are already involved in meaningful societal transformation. Universities have much to learn from multiethnic, multiracial grassroots organizations and churches which are making major contributions to the creation of healthy communities and addressing real world problems (Gamson, 1997). On the part of communities, there is much work to be done to overcome the belief that universities are disconnected and inaccessible, slow moving, and out of touch with real issues (Caldwell, Domhidy, Homan, & Garazini, 1997).

Organizational Metaphors

Although the literature reveals tremendous interest and commitment to service learning, it also reveals that service learning is not yet part of the fabric of academic life. In examining the viewpoints of various authors who are advocating for the institutionalization of service learning, it appears that certain organizations are more open to the institutionalization of service learning. The metaphors of Morgan (1997) which might characterize such institutions include: the brain, political systems, and flux and transformation. Colleges and universities most open to service learning are complex learning systems which have networked intelligence. They have the capacity to link seemingly disconnected entities - students, faculty, various disciplines, and the community - into an integrated web where information is exchanged and grown. Such institutions have the ability to sense, monitor and scan the environment. Rather than view the environment (i.e. the community) as a threat to or as disconnected from higher education, these colleges and universities welcome community partnerships. Double loop, rather than single loop learning, is the norm in such institutions as they invite the reflection of students and community members in a mutual search for knowledge and an application of knowledge in service of the common good. Like "brain" organizations, such colleges and universities are able to relinquish the need for traditional leaders (faculty and college administrators) to set the agenda. Students and community members share equally in establishing, implementing, and assessing service learning goals.

The scope of this paper did not allow a full exploration of the dynamics of community-college/university partnerships. However, it is especially in relation to the development of these partnerships that the metaphor of political systems seems relevant. In particular, the dynamics of establishing community-college/university partnerships involves focusing on the relationships between interests, conflict, and power. Institutions of higher education have their own agenda, as do communities. One of the challenges of establishing viable partnerships is identifying where the goals of campus and community intersect and planning mutually beneficial collaborative projects and activities. Because of the existence of sometimes competing goals, there is a potential for conflict between campus and community. Both institutions of higher education and communities need to understand conflict and develop strategies to manage it appropriately in order to build and sustain viable partnerships. Finally, an understanding of power is critical to the establishment of community partnerships. Since knowledge is power, those within and without the college or university often, perhaps subconsciously, perceive that faculty possess power and control what is shared with students and community members. Institutionalizing service learning requires that power be shared among all stakeholders - students, faculty, and community members.

The final metaphor which seems particularly appropriate for organizations moving toward the institutionalization of service learning is the metaphor of flux and transformation. This metaphor embraces the concept of a closed organizational system in which everything is systemically interdependent. The environment is not disconnected from the organization. In the same way, the college or university seeking to institutionalize service learning has minimized the boundaries between and among disciplines; between administration, faculty and staff; between faculty and students; and between campus and community. The attractor theory reflects well the manner in which the push and pull of campus, community, faculty, and students shapes and re-shapes knowledge and research within service learning organizations. Like the butterfly effect, sometimes a small change or a random meeting can bring college and community into an entirely new relationship. The multiple loop thinking associated with the metaphor of flux and transformation is also apparent as service learning activities involve administration and faculty in increasingly complex interactions with one another, with students, and with the community. In such an organization the challenge is to manage paradox and be willing to move into unplanned and unimagined new relationships and new explorations.

Conclusion

This paper began as an exploration of the civic mission of colleges and universities. Research quickly surfaced several major themes: the civic mission of colleges and universities; whether such a mission has been lost; and, if so, whether and how it might be recovered. Related themes which emerged centered on democratic education, service learning, and campus-community partnerships. Finally research related to the insititutionalization of service learning surfaced. The challenge of this paper became the need to limit the research and narrow the focus to a manageable question which could be explored in the context of the course focus on organization and administration. For anyone wishing to pursue the various themes surfaced, each possibility holds the potential for a compelling research project.

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