This chapter discusses the elements of academic service learning and why this pedagogy is important for contemporary higher education.

Academic Service Learning: Its Meaning and Relevance

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For the new millennium, the critique of American culture seems to take on urgency in our public and private conversations. Whether in speeches of political leaders, in commentaries of public opinion analysts, or in conversations around the family table, we worry together about who we are as a nation, what is happening to us, and what needs to be done to ensure that in the twenty-first century we have greater vision, energy, and unity than we now have. What will our citizens be like? How will we define the common good? How will we respond to global challenges?

One specific concern is that the voices affirming the individualism strand of our tradition seem to be muffling those affirming the community strand (Bellah and others, 1985). A second and related issue is that the all-pervasive metaphor of the individual as a *consumer* crowds out such metaphors as *citizen* or *neighbor,* which capture and celebrate our interrelationships (Harwood Group, 1996). Finally, there is the charge that we are losing (or have lost) our shared family values and neighborhood ties; we seem to be more distant from others and more frazzled in our attempts to balance the varying demands of private and public life.

Part of this cultural critique focuses on higher education's role in society (Parks Daloz, Keen, Keen, and Daloz Parks, 1996). How are institutions of higher learning preparing students for active roles in public life? What "good" does college and university research provide for society? What is the responsibility of these institutions to the larger society, and are they fulfilling it?

In this context, attention to service learning takes on vital importance. Proponents of service learning contend that the cultural critique cited above must, first of all, be taken seriously; second, that service learning must provide

a positive though partial response to that cultural critique; and, third, that this pedagogy can offer potential advantages to all members—communities, students, faculty, colleges, and universities—through the work of forming new, challenging partnerships aimed at advancing knowledge and helping to remedy the deficiencies in our common life. The pedagogy is not risk-free, as proponents hasten to add, but it is precisely because the stakes are so high that the risk is worth taking.

This chapter has three purposes: to clarify what academic service learning entails; to identify some of the crucial debates in the field; and to invite faculty and administrators who are not yet familiar with it to consider its implementation. I first highlight some elements of contemporary higher education that serve as background for the growth and relevance of academic service learning, and then turn to a detailed examination of it.

Purposes of Higher Education Institutions

Institutions of higher education have multiple purposes. As articulated in the contemporary discourse, these purposes focus on teaching (and for many, the essential correlative, learning), research, and service. Part of the excitement of the current debate comes from the energy devoted to reconceptualizing the definitions and content of each of these purposes and, in the process, recognizing that they are not mutually exclusive. The late Ernest Boyer, perhaps more than any other individual, advocated expanding the definitions of the key terms and called for the academy to turn more attention and resources to the compelling needs of contemporary society (1990). In describing what he named the "New American College," for example, Boyer presented a vision of a new entity: "an institution that celebrates teaching and selectively supports research, while also taking special pride in its capacity to connect thought to action, theory to practice" (Boyer, 1994).

Each of the 3400 institutions of higher learning in this country addresses teaching, research, and service in its own way. One manifestation of uniqueness is found in the mission statement in which each institution spells out the key elements of its identity, goals, and aspirations. One often finds a section in the mission statement on how the institution conceives of its relationship to the local and larger community. Mission statements, important in themselves, only become real in the students, faculty, staff, and administrators who comprise the institution (see Chapter Nine).

Though we have national data on the professoriate (Magner, 1996) and incoming students (Astin, Korn, and Sax, 1994; Loeb, 1994), each institution nevertheless must undertake its own studies as well. What do the faculty and students think are the goals of this institution? What resources are available to meet those goals? What is valued and rewarded? Raising these questions opens a host of stimulating conversations, including the essential ones about what *teaching* means, what is important to teach, and how we know whether *learning* is taking place. Contemporary educators have contributed much to this debate with vibrant images and concepts: Citizenship Schools (Horton and

Freire, 1990), the banking and problem-posing models of education (Freire, 1993), education as a spiritual journey (Palmer, 1993), and education as the practice of freedom ("teaching to transgress") (hooks, 1994). It is into this conversation that practitioners of service learning enter.

Academic Service Learning in Higher Education

Service learning traces its roots to several important forces (Jacoby, 1996). One is certainly the decades-long work of organizations such as the National Society for Experiential Education and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, among others. In addition, several key events in the last decade have spurred the development of service learning. College students formed COOL (Campus Outreach Opportunity League) in 1984 with the mission to educate and empower students to strengthen the nation through service. In 1985 college and university presidents formed Campus Compact, an organization to expand opportunities for public and community service in higher education and to advocate the importance of civic responsibility in students' learning. In 1989 a small advisory group gathered at Wingspread and created "Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning" (Honnet and Poulsen, 1989). In 1994 The Invisible College was created as a gathering place for faculty interested in the integration of service and learning in higher education.

Elements of Academic Service Learning

Not surprisingly, definitions of service learning vary (see, for example, Honnet and Poulsen, 1989; Howard, 1993; Jacoby and Associates, 1996; Kendall and Associates, 1986; Rhoads, 1997). I suggest that at least six key elements, taken together, help differentiate service learning from voluntarism, community service, and other forms of experiential education (Kendall, 1990). Three of the elements focus more on the community side of the equation; the other three focus more on the campus side. On the community side: the student provides some meaningful service (work), that meets a need or goal, that is defined by a community (or some of its members). On the campus side: the service provided by the student flows from and into course objectives, is integrated into the course by means of assignments that require some form of reflection on the service in light of course objectives, and the assignment is assessed and evaluated accordingly.

To talk about service learning we must begin the conversation with a look at what is meant by *service*. *The Oxford English Dictionary* offers 38 definitions, among which we find a subset that focuses on help, benefit, and advantage, such as "conduct tending to the welfare or advantage of another" and "supply of the needs of persons." This seems to be what most practitioners have in mind at the most general level. Yet service is a marvelously complex and contested term. Let me highlight three issues to consider. First, what kind of attitudes do the provider of service and the recipient of the service bring to the experience?

If, for example, the student in a service learning course approaches the community with a "Messiah-complex," what are the chances that student and community will have a fruitful experience? Second, must the service be voluntary to be authentic? If, for example, a faculty requires service as part of the course, does this eviscerate the service? Third, is enhancement of citizenship intrinsic to all service learning courses, or is it the backdrop of much of service learning but not necessarily an essential goal of it?

In part because of these important questions, some prefer to talk about *community-based learning* or *community learning* rather than *service learning* (see Seidel and Zlotkowski, 1993). Community-based learning offers a conceptual space needed for developing more reciprocal relationships among the partners. With this term, for example, faculty and students can explicitly affirm that there are many sites of learning, including but not limited to the classroom. Students come to understand that they have an opportunity to gain new knowledge and insight through the service they provide in a community setting. Community representatives, as well as adult recipients of the service, can see themselves more as partners or co-teachers with the classroom teacher.

Let us examine each of the six elements of the definition, starting with the community side.

The student provides meaningful service. Some fear that the word *service* carries with it some negative messages (McKnight, 1989). An option is to use the word *work* as the descriptor of what students offer to the community. Whether the term *service* or *work* is preferred, a key concern is the adjective *meaningful*. It involves the notion of a significant amount of time dedicated to the service (although the amount is not universally agreed upon by all practitioners). It speaks to the issue of being useful or helpful, implying that the service makes a contribution, however small. In this context, preparation of students takes on a broader significance. If students are to work, for example, in an ethnic community or with a socioeconomic group different from their own, what preparation must they have before offering service to members of that community? Finally, in terms of defining what is meaningful, it is the community group making the request that is principally involved in that defining.

The service that students provide meets a need or goal of some kind. In other words, the service is not "make work." The service must be related somehow to a real need.

Members of a community define the need. Community is another one of the contested terms; it is rich in history and meaning. However it is conceived, it is certainly true that many people may define needs, including the faculty, who generally know what kinds of skills, attitudes, and preparation the students have. First-year, eighteen-year-old students in a liberal arts college, for example, will probably have abilities and skills different from those of senior-year, nontraditional-aged accounting students. In the conversation about what the community is seeking, needs or goals can be identified that might not otherwise have been recognized; in this interchange, the partners may uncover potential benefits they had not imagined.

Now let us turn to the elements on the campus side of the equation:

The service provided by the students flows from course objectives. Although some faculty design their courses with particular objectives in mind, for others the objectives remain at a fairly high level of abstraction. A first step is to be quite specific about course objectives and how various assignments address the objectives (Kendall and Associates, 1986). The faculty member can begin to think about alternative ways of meeting those objectives and how service in the community can be both feasible and appropriate to meet some course objective. A caution is in order: faculty should never dream up a service assignment that has nothing to do with the objectives of the course. Introductory course objectives will of necessity be different from those of a more advanced course; the faculty best knows for whom and for what the course is designed. The reader can find exciting examples of courses that incorporate service in a variety of sources (see Howard, 1993; Jackson, 1994; Kendall, 1990; Kupiec, 1993).

Service is integrated into the course by means of an assignment (or assignments) that requires some form of reflection on the service in light of course objectives. Having students in a community providing service is necessary but not sufficient for academic service learning to occur. There must be structured opportunities for the students to reflect on that service in light of course goals (Troppe, 1995). Faculty can employ a range of vehicles, from journals and other kinds of writing assignments to classroom discussions and oral presentations (Kendall, 1990; Kupiec, 1993; Troppe, 1995). In short, through the various assignments, service becomes an integral part of the academic work of the course.

Assignments rooted in the service must be assessed and evaluated accordingly. The standard refrain is this: We are grading the learning, not the service (Howard, 1993; Troppe, 1995). A simple analog is a reading assignment in, for example, a history course: We do not grade students on their reading, we grade them on their ability to demonstrate what they have learned from that reading. In parallel fashion, we must grade students' demonstrations of learning that come from the service assignment.

The community has a role in assessment. In employing service learning we are undertaking a partnership; all partners need to have some voice in the various aspects of the relationship. When it comes to assessing, faculty can invite input about the learning of each student from the community co-teacher through, for example, meetings or phone conversations or by asking the co-teacher to fill out an evaluation form that is then incorporated into the final assessment.

Some Critical Issues

In thinking about whether to incorporate service into a course or curricular program, faculty and administrators must address six other key issues in addition to those cited above.

Must a faculty member do service at the same time the students do? On the one hand, just as faculty read all the assigned texts for the course, should not faculty also do the assignment of service? In addition, since service in the community has potentially serious interpersonal consequences, does it not behoove faculty to have the experience of service to better understand and prepare students for the service? On the other hand is the practical issue of whether, in any particular semester or quarter, the faculty member has the necessary time to undertake the service. It may suffice that the faculty member has done the service at some point in time, not necessarily in the particular semester or quarter it is assigned for the students.

Should all students in a course, not just some, participate in service? Those in favor of the participation of all students argue, philosophically, that by having alternative assignments the faculty denies students a universal experience that is essential to the purposes of the course; pragmatically, they argue that it may be too difficult to have uniform grading standards across disparate assignments. Philosophically, those opposed contend that alternatives add richness to the class experience if the alternatives are shared with all students in some way; pragmatically, they contend that not all students can undertake a community-based assignment in a given semester or quarter for a variety of reasons, or that a community cannot absorb large numbers of students in supervised settings.

Are all placements equally legitimate for academic service learning? Some faculty and administrators judge that it is appropriate to place students only in *direct service* settings as opposed to *social action/social change* situations. They worry that the latter are more "political." Others maintain that all service learning placements are political in some way just as all have embedded in them a model of social change (Morton, 1995; see also Chapters Four and Five).

How can faculty get started? Clearly, if there is an office or a person hired to make links with the community, handle issues of transportation, deal with on-site supervision or monitoring, address legal concerns, and develop a number of placement sites, the work of faculty is greatly facilitated. Without such an infrastructure, faculty can still begin by locating a potential partner such as an agency in the local community. As the relationship develops, the partners can explore the opportunities for and obstacles to course linkages.

How are "failures" on a service learning assignment handled? One issue focuses on a student cheating (for example, claiming to have worked so many hours, which are written about for the assignment, when in fact the service was not done). The faculty or campus policies for handling cheating would come into play here as they do for any assignment. A related issue deals with the quality of the student's service. If the service is poorly rendered, what can be done? Did the student's service harm any recipients or damage any relationships? What is the community partner's perspective on the situation?

How does academic service learning relate to faculty reward structures? Will the faculty be penalized or rewarded for undertaking academic service learning? The National Project on Institutional Priorities and Faculty Rewards, coordinated at Syracuse University, is examining this pivotal concern. The Project

operates on two key premises: "that redefining scholarship will expand the range of activities considered to be appropriate work for faculty members" and "that having disciplinary societies set out a full range of activities upon which tenure and promotion decisions can be based will help change the priorities for faculty members" (Diamond, 1994, p. B1).

Rewards of Academic Service Learning

Given the formidable challenges presented by service learning, why should faculty and administrators take on the hard work of incorporating service learning into their courses or institution? First, there is the joy that academic service learning provides. It can contribute to the renewal of the love of teaching that draws so many into higher education in the first place. Many faculty wanted, and still want, to have teaching and learning make a difference—for students, for themselves, and ultimately, for the world. Service learning not only makes that desire real again but also offers a way of effecting it. Second, because service learning crosses so many boundaries, it offers new opportunities to think more consciously and more creatively about relationships, including those of faculty and student, disciplinary and interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary knowledge, campus and community. Third, because service learning is an evolving field, those who enter it have the opportunity to contribute to its development. Fourth, because service learning calls for a link between what goes on in the classroom and what goes on in a community, it offers a vehicle to faculty, students, and community partners for thinking and responding in new, collaborative ways to the critical issues that confront our local and global worlds.

In short, academic service learning offers one avenue for rethinking and re-imagining the whats, whys, and for whoms of higher education in the context of contemporary criticisms.

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