Models of Good Practice for Service-Learning Programs

What Can We Learn From 1,000 Faculty, 25,000 Students, and 27 Institutions Involved in Service?

by Mary Kay Schneider

Mary Kay Schneider is a doctoral candidate in the college student personnel program at the University of Maryland, College Park. She recently completed an internship with AAHE's Service-Learning Project. Write to her at 311 O'Neill HOB, Washington, DC 20515; marykay.schneider@clerk.house.gov.

What makes service-learning thrive on campus?

We know anecdotally that service-learning is gaining attention; however, we frequently don't understand the components that comprise strong programs. AAHE, Campus Compact, and the National Society for Experiential Education studied 27 colleges and universities nominated by community service and service-learning experts to better understand service-learning on campuses and to get a pulse on what is happening nationally. Community colleges, private colleges, liberal arts institutions, four-year public institutions, research institutions, and historically black colleges and universities were included in the survey. The nominated institutions were viewed to have strong service-learning programs, but this in no way means that other institutions are not involved in good work. Service-learning is a national movement and many institutions are involved and committed.

On average, programs studied as models of good practice offered about 50 service-learning courses a year and had approximately 44 faculty teaching more than 1,100 students. Although the average number of faculty and staff coordinating an institution's service-learning program was 4.4, the range was one to more than 10 people. Another interesting finding: 55.6% of the model programs reported to academic affairs, 18.5% reported to student affairs, and 25.9% reported to both academic and student affairs. Many of the respondents noted that they maintained strong relationships with both areas, regardless of reporting structures. If curricular service-learning and co-curricular community service were housed in different offices, most of those institutions reported strong collaborations between the two areas and saw the interconnectedness of the work.

Each participating campus was unique and approached service-learning in a manner consistent with its own institutional culture and mission. This variety adds to the richness of the field of service-learning and student outcomes. In an attempt to grasp the mainstays of each program, 13 themes were drawn from the 27 participating institutions. While no one theme was primary, a combination of all or most of the themes was present in each model.

THEMES OF SUCCESS

1. Have a vision and a well-defined mission.

Mission statements, guiding principles, and vision statements

guide most model service-learning programs. By clearly articulating a purpose and a long-range vision, model programs make it easy for academic leadership, faculty, and others to understand service-learning and how it furthers the institutional mission and student learning. In addition, the vision guides faculty and staff in planning and developing the service-learning program.

Tying the service-learning mission to the institutional mission is a thread shared by all participating institutions. Benefits include centrality of service-learning, easier justification of funding, greater buy-in by faculty and administrators, and assessment of outcomes that support the institution. For one institution, the mission has provided "strong support within the administration for service-learning and a rationale for budget requests and grant applications."

2. Capitalize on what you do well and do it with quality.

Know thyself. Participating institutions know what they are doing well and capitalize on this while also building other areas of their programs. Ensuring that everything is done with a high level of quality is important before proceeding with new initiatives. Most programs recognize their strengths and build on these. The staff walk the balance of doing cutting-edge work that is still within their limits.

Institution type may drive the focus of the program. For North Carolina Central University, "community capacity-building and student leadership are priorities." The University of Pennsylvania's focus extends to the surrounding community: "Penn's range of resources can serve as the catalytic agent for galvanizing other institutions, as well as government, in concerted ways to improve the quality of life in West Philadelphia/ Philadelphia."

Staff and faculty try to gauge needs and abilities before expanding their programs. Although some schools have concrete goals regarding the number of future service-learning courses, the predominant vision is to offer enough courses for every student to participate.

3. Support and leadership are important ingredients.

Support from high levels of the administration and guidance by the president are key components for service-learning on these campuses. "Top administrative support, especially our president, has made resources available to support a successful program, which has led to a highly motivated and talented staff to coordinate our large, comprehensive service-learning program." The support can entail encouraging faculty to develop service-learning courses, hiring professionals to coordinate and facilitate the development of service-learning within the curriculum, and appropriating financial resources.

Support and leadership are also often provided by advisory boards that play a variety of roles, including program development, assessment, and guidance. One institution's service-learning advisory committee provided "important guidance and feedback to the development of the service-learning program; it did not determine policy." Institutions may utilize one or more than one service-learning advisory board, such as boards that include faculty, students, community members, and staff; faculty advisory boards; and community agency boards. Another avenue of support is the national and state organizations. Most of the models of good practice mentioned knowledge, support, resources, and networks gained from organizations such as AAHE, Campus Compact, NSEE, and AACC. "These organizations provide support to our work in various ways: creating support at the highest levels of the adminis-

tration, providing numerous conferences and monographs in which issues in the field can be explored, providing opportunities for faculty and students to present and write about their work, and creating networks of colleagues who can support and learn from each other."

4. One person can make a difference.

Individuals who stay current regarding service-learning and work to build institutional support often drive programs. These individuals, through their patience and persistence, frequently make the difference between service-learning integrated into the curriculum and service-learning as a minor program. In addition, many campuses had crucial "Johnny Appleseeds" who started, nurtured, and guided their programs.

5. Service-learning is found in every discipline.

For campuses already engaged in service-learning, every area of the curriculum can or does offer service-learning courses. In this study, institutions offered service-learning in practically every academic department or as service-learning options for most courses; this range included liberal arts and sciences, engineering, nursing, automotive repair, and journalism. Service-learning may occur within the major disciplines or within the professional schools, may be directed at first-year students, may be integrated into the curriculum, and may be a program that faculty choose to participate in.

At one school, "Engaging in *scholarship* associated with service-learning has stimulated the development of our work and given it visibility." At another school, "the Center for Community Partnerships seeks to develop academically based community service, intrinsically linked to faculty and student teaching and research."

6. Roles and rewards for faculty.

Faculty play a variety of roles in service-learning; however, they tend to be central figures. Faculty investment is critical. Typically, each model of good practice has at least a core group of faculty, and these faculty often lead the service-learning initiative. At North Carolina Central University, "the service-learning initiative is faculty-driven by a formal structure, the Faculty/Administrators Service Learning Fellows Program. Forty faculty fellows train and mentor other faculty members. Faculty also promote the institutionalization of service-learning designed to create a seamless service-learning stream in the University's departments." The University of Utah also has strong faculty leadership through a Faculty Advisory Committee that "steers the direction of service-learning on campus in several ways, including approving courses for service-learning designation; developing awards for faculty and encouraging the evaluation of service-learning in the retention, promotion, and tenure process; and developing partnerships with university administration to ensure the survival of service-learning over the long-term."

Other programs have faculty and staff who assist and support faculty in their work. Resources provided to faculty include a service-learning checklist that outlines the steps to create a service-learning course, teaching-for-service seminars, and reflection methods workshops. Other benefits to faculty are support from graduate and undergraduate teaching assistants.

Support and rewards for faculty may include course development stipends, release time (rarely offered), faculty mentors, teaching assistants, workshops, resource materials, assistance with curriculum development, national and regional conferences, one-on-one consultations, presentations to departments, publicity for service-learning courses, and newsletters. Despite these supports, few of the institutions have extrinsic rewards for the faculty. In rare instances, service-learning is considered in the tenure process. Overall, roles and rewards for faculty vary by institution; however, it was obvious that faculty must be invested in service-learning for it to blossom.

7. Complexity.

Most of the programs or institutions have a subtle or not-so-subtle degree of complexity in the work that they do. Typically there are multiple offerings to serve differing needs and interests, such as a fourth-credit option, service options integrated into the course or into the semester, co-curricular service with reflection, service-learning listed in the schedule of courses, and a required number of service hours to graduate. This complexity is intentionally designed so that many people (students, faculty, and community) can be reached.

To best manage this complexity, institutions may create infrastructures to promote continued growth and success. At the University of Utah, the faculty created criteria that courses must meet to be labeled "service-learning." Advisory boards can also help guide the complexity of services and resources. The use of outside grants to supplement and guide new initiatives adds to the depth of service-learning at institutions. Many colleges and universities also create guidelines to direct their work.

8. Student support and leadership.

Students play an integral part in service-learning. They may have leadership roles in the offices, push campuses to offer greater service-learning options, or simply support the programs that are offered. In fact, many students design their own service-learning courses, options, and activities. Frequently, students are also involved with co-curricular community service that complements service-learning. On many of the campuses, strong student interest helped initiate and drive service-learning programs.

Students are involved with service-learning in a variety of ways: community service scholarships, service-learning residence halls, undergraduate and graduate teaching assistantships, and student coordinators of different agencies or service areas. No matter what the format, students are the mainstay of service-learning.

9. Agency and community involvement.

Community service agencies and community members play critical roles in the design, administration, and evaluation of service-learning. Community members may sit on steering committees, work with faculty in designing course curricula, evaluate student volunteers, develop collaborative partnerships, and even co-teach a course. "The school and community agencies are integrally involved in the design of the programs in which they are engaged. Administration of programs is a shared responsibility depending on the projects, the site, and the funding sources." For most institutions, the community was viewed as a partner in a joint venture. "It has been critical for us to build long-term relationships with sites that have the potential for effecting positive community change. The importance of embedding the work at the proper site is a critical lesson."

At the University of Southern California, "all agencies are 'partners' and commit themselves to having a specific staff person responsible for coordinating the program on-site, placing students, problem solving, etc. In return, we commit ourselves to ensuring each site that they can expect a critical number of students each semester."

The relationship with the community tends to be fluid and

mutually valued; much effort has gone into creating and maintaining these relationships. Inherent in the relationship is that mutual needs are met. For Butler University, "at the core of this definition is the idea that we will provide a good placement for students and not act as a drain to any community setting or placement."

10. Cutting-edge work.

The models of good practice tend to take some risks and try new, innovative approaches. They capitalize on new programs such as America Reads; use VISTA volunteers; develop broad partnerships; and work with other local institutions. Model schools seem willing to expand the boundaries in areas of need and where there are resources to support this growth. These schools tend to not invest everything into new programs until they have some proof that the programs will work, and they often begin cutting-edge work with grants or other external funding. These institutions have the willingness and the ability to raise funds from the community to initiate good programs and gradually seek university funding and support. Examples of cutting-edge or creative work include living-learning communities; citizen-scholar programs; service scholarships; and the Borchard Faculty Fellow, selected annually to assist new faculty in developing service-learning courses.

11. Defined outcomes.

The University of Michigan's service-learning mission is to engage students and faculty in a process that combines community service and academic learning to promote civic participation, build community capacity, and enhance the educational process. While institutions tend to have defined outcomes, like Michigan's, they have various ways of assessing these outcomes and often outcomes go unmeasured.

Some institutions have a holis-tic method of assessment, in that they survey and evaluate multiple program areas; others may not track information as thoroughly. One service-learning office supplies an end-of-semester course evaluation form to all service-learning course instructors. This institution also mails a survey to faculty to see whether they taught a service-learning course that semester, they plan to teach one next semester, and they want their course cross-listed in the university schedule of classes.

Service-learning offices may coordinate the collection of data regarding outcomes for students. To best assess outcomes, they must be clearly defined. The theme here is that institutions seem to know what they want from service-learning, but they may need to focus more attention on assessment.

12. Programs age well.

Service-learning programs at the models of good practice ranged in age from three to 26 years old. The most established and institutionalized programs tended to be older; however, some of the newer programs were strong because of extensive development support. At Brevard Community College, a significant amount of growth occurred as it expanded on already well-established programs. In particular, they:
▶ established presence quickly with materials and office space;
▶ received presidential promotion through speaking engagements;
▶ used small grants as seeds for increased college-match and other bigger grants;
▶ documented quickly benefits of service-learning, and marketed results;
▶ won key support from faculty and staff with an initial survey;
▶ held visible events such as care fairs and recognition events;
▶ made the center for service-learning visible in major pub-

lications and in college planning processes;
▶ offered a teaching-for-service seminar;
▶ added separate, stand-alone community service courses;
▶ included service-learning in accreditation; and
▶ demonstrated early success.

13. Keep an eye on the national, state, and local scenes.

Model institutions pay attention to "hot topics" and often forecast upcoming issues. They are ready to adapt to local and state initiatives or to write a grant for the newest national program. Institutions are aware of resources, understand the value in partnering, and manage grants of varying sizes. Often, models of good practice are involved in national programs such as America Reads or AmeriCorps. State Campus Compacts, conferences, publications, and other resources are key in staying current. Finally, these schools often address local, state, and national issues with the assistance of various national organizations. This support entails technical assistance resources, conferences, excellent publications, an advocacy role for internal support, conference/program consultants, dialogue, and external networking opportunities.

MORE TO COME

Service-learning continues to grow and gain acceptance as a learning and teaching strategy. New initiatives will focus on national work within the disciplines and disciplinary associations, examination of service-learning by institution type, training for community service-learning directors, development of a new service-learning research agenda, and community development and outcomes. ■

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More about each of the models of good practice will be posted to the Service-Learning pages of AAHE's website, www.aahe.org.