Chapter 8
Service Learning:
Impacting Change, Promoting Social Justice, Equity, and Inclusion – An Effective Framework for Social and Professional Studies Programs

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ABSTRACT

Service learning is a means of outreach, and civic engagement is rooted in the Wisconsin Idea and the belief that education's influence should expand beyond the classroom to influence people's lives. The Wisconsin Idea rested on the conviction that students and university-trained experts could apply themselves to the problems of modern society and make democracy work more effectively. Service learning is a high-impact strategy and connects the curriculum to communities through by solving problems within. Marginalized communities benefit from expertise, free labor, resource allocation, and research support to promote inclusion, equity, and social justice. This chapter examines service learning in multiple social and professional degree programs. These projects include projects, embedded within various courses, semester-long service-learning classes, as well as a team projects. In addition to examining their programs' experiences, the authors present lessons learned and make recommendations about effective practices in managing these projects.

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, the debate as to the role and type of the university curriculum in preparing graduates has been pondered for nearly 300 hundred years. Shortly after the founding of the Academy of Philadelphia (the forerunner of the University of Pennsylvania) in 1740, Benjamin Franklin promoted the idea that the purpose of the institution was to prepare students to serve country, mankind, as well as friends and family (Harkavy & Hartley, 2010). In the early 19th century, the debate taken up by Yale faculty in a series of three reports known as the Yale Report of 1828, was whether the focus of the curriculum should include the classical languages and pedagogy of a liberal arts education or to focus on the industrialization emerging at that time (Herbst, 2004). At the turn of the 20th century, the Wisconsin Idea "rested on the conviction that students and university-trained experts could apply themselves to the problems of modern society and make democracy work more effectively" (Zieren & Stoddard, 2004, p. 30). One of the pedagogical strategies which also serves as a means of outreach and civic engagement which is rooted in the Wisconsin Idea and the belief that education's influence should expand beyond the classroom to influence people's lives is service learning (Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, 2022).

BACKGROUND

Service learning is a variety of experiential learning activities, which not only serves as an opportunity for university faculty and students to engage the community in service as well as serve as an effective pedagogical tool. The term service learning was first introduced in 1966 but did not gain in popularity in higher education until the 1980s (Harkavy & Hartley, 2010; Santiago-Ortiz, 2019). The American Association of Colleges and Universities identifies service learning as 1 of its 10 High Impact Educational Practices which are effective in working with students of diverse backgrounds (Kuh, 2008). Service learning affords students the opportunity to develop academic skills, such as critical thinking and writing, college learning skills, develop leadership skills, civic and social responsibility, as well as their commitment to activism (Arthur & Valentine, 2018; Jurmu, 2015; Rogers, 2010). Students are also able to develop their professional identity, grow personally, through their engagement in a service learning course (Bloomquist, 2015; Jurmu, 2015). Service learning is distinguishable from other forms of experiential learning three ways. First, student learning, both academic and civic, is augmented by both traditional and community learning. Second, both the community and the students benefit from the service learning project. Third, community organizations are true partners in the service learning project or activity (Lim & Bloomquist, 2015). Bringle and Clayton (2021) further posit that service learning engages students, community members, and staff, in co-creating strategies that amalgamate scholarly material, community-engaged activities, and critical reflection to advance both learning and social change.

In the wake of disproportionate minority contact in the criminal justice system, healthcare disparities, abuse of police use of force, the inaccessibility of affordable housing, as well as other social problems, and power dynamics, social justice (defined by Stith et al., 2021, p. 9 as the equitable distribution of economic, political, and social rights, opportunities, and power), disparity has emerged as a resounding theme in contemporary society. Colleges and universities have emerged as a solution and do so through service learning (Santiago-Ortiz, 2019; Stith et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2018). Experiential learning is

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