Service-Learning Essentials: Questions, Answers, and Lessons Learned

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PREFACE

It was a beautiful morning on a rolling green campus of a regional Midwestern

university. As faculty members arrived for the 9:00 a.m. workshop on service-learning course

design, I asked them, as I always do, to jot down on post-it notes their reasons for coming to the

workshop and their biggest questions about service-learning. I looked over the questions while

members of the university's technology services staff set up the podium and projector. I was not

surprised to see familiar questions: "How is service-learning different from other internships?",

"Could it work in my discipline?", and "How do I get started?" Those who have some

experience with service-learning wondered, "How can I develop sustained community

partnerships?", "How can I increase academic rigor?", and "Can service-learning be taught

online?"

At lunch, I met with institutional leaders who asked me questions about what it would

take to "grow" service-learning across disciplines. They were concerned about student

recruitment and retention and wondered whether there is evidence that service-learning can make

a difference in these areas. If we go "full speed ahead" with service-learning as an institutional

priority, they asked, how will we know if we "move the needle"?

Later that afternoon, I met with the staff of the small service-learning center, a few

student affairs professionals in other areas, and student leaders who were involved in planning

and organizing service days. I engaged the students in a reflection activity about the differences

between volunteerism and social change. They were enthusiastic about service-learning, but they

asked: "How can we get participants to take reflection seriously?" "Should we focus on responding to natural disasters far away or on needs in our local communities?"

When I returned to my own campus, I visited a graduate class in our higher education and student affairs program as a guest speaker about service-learning. The students wanted to "trouble" the concept and practice of service-learning, to grapple with questions such as: "How do we keep service-learning from perpetuating the status quo of need and dependency?" "Can universities and communities really develop authentic, democratic partnerships with communities, or is the power differential simply too great?" "What is the ultimate purpose of service-learning?"

The need for this book became increasingly clear to me as I recognized that I have been asked these and other questions over and over again as I engage with hundreds of faculty members, administrators, students, and community leaders through conference keynote addresses, workshops, consultations, and online formats. As I answered the questions that have good answers and puzzled through those that do not, I realized that I needed to record these questions along with the best possible responses. I felt the need to compile the questions—from the simplest to the most complex—for the faculty, staff, and students new to service-learning who encounter its difficult dilemmas as well as those of us with much experience who find it useful to revisit and examine its basic principles and practices as we develop new courses and cocurricular experiences. Further, besides my own books, I know of none that encompasses and validates both curricular and cocurricular service-learning. The others tend to focus on academic, course-based service-learning, leaving student affairs professionals, leadership educators, campus ministers, and others with few resources to guide their work.

I also strongly feel the need to share the many lessons I have learned over the years that I have labored in the vineyards of service-learning. I have made mistakes, embarrassed myself, and learned a great deal from my faculty and student affairs colleagues, community partners, and students. I have also learned much from those of you who have taken me into your confidence about your own missteps and dilemmas and how you handled them. I have shared the joys and frustrations you have experienced and been inspired by what you have discovered about service-learning and yourselves.

I have been intimately involved with service-learning since 1992 when I was charged with starting the service-learning program at the University of Maryland by my supervisor, the iconic Vice President for Student Affairs, William L. "Bud" Thomas, Jr. I immediately informed him that I planned to develop service-learning simultaneously in both the curriculum and the cocurriculum. He promptly responded, "Barbara, if you try to involve the faculty, they will sink your ship before you get it out of the harbor." When I proposed to do the book that became *Service-Learning in Higher Education: Concepts and Practices* (1996), Gale Erlandson, my editor at Jossey-Bass, seriously questioned the wisdom of using the term *service-learning* instead of *community service*, wondering whether service-learning had enough traction in higher education to attract a sufficient audience.

We have come a long way. I wholeheartedly agree with my distinguished University of Maryland colleague, KerryAnn O'Meara, that "service-learning is now part of the permanent landscape of higher education" (2011, p. 181). We have amassed considerable evidence of the benefits of service-learning for students and communities. Further, I agree with other respected colleagues, Patti H. Clayton, Robert G. Bringle, and Julie A. Hatcher, that "change does not come easily to higher education, but service-learning has demonstrated its capacity to have an

influence on dimensions of the academy that are among the most difficult to change: the curriculum, faculty work, organizational infrastructure, budget allocations, promotion and tenure, assessment of student learning, and community-campus partnerships" (2013, vol. 1, p. ix).

Some of you who are familiar with my extensive work in the area civic engagement may wonder why this book focuses squarely on service-learning rather than more broadly on—call it what you will—civic learning and action, democratic engagement, active citizenship, public service. It was very tempting. However, I decided to concentrate on service-learning partly because I agree strongly with our colleagues at Campus Compact that "service-learning is the most widespread, well-known practice … aimed at preparing students with the knowledge and the skills needed for democratic citizenship" (cited in Zlotkowski, 2011, pp. 223-24). Further, as firmly as I believe in the tremendous potential of service-learning to prepare students to be active participants in our democracy and to work on behalf of social change, I am also all too aware of that, when not done well, service-learning can have unfortunate effects on students, such as reinforcing their stereotypes and perpetuating the view that service is the most effective means of addressing social issues. Therefore, the primary purpose of this book is to define and promote high-quality service-learning, both to enable it to fulfill its promise and to serve as the foundation for advancing civic agency and engagement.

I firmly believe that service-learning will survive and thrive into the future because we continue to ask questions—fundamental and straightforward, demanding and challenging—about its purpose and value, how to do it and how to do it better, how we will know whether it makes any difference, and how the powerful combination of service and learning can catalyze broader and deeper engagement between higher education institutions and communities around the world and in our own backyards. In this spirit, I offer questions, answers, and lessons learned to

stimulate the further growth of service-learning across the spectrum of higher education, to enhance our practice, and to inspire deeper reflection on how service-learning can realize its unbounded potential to enrich teaching and learning, to enhance communities, to improve higher education institutions, and to educate the next generation of socially responsible citizens, scholars, and leaders.

Audiences

The audiences for this book are faculty in all disciplines, leaders and staff members of service-learning centers, colleagues who engage faculty in professional development, student affairs professionals, campus ministers, leadership educators, service-learning advocates, and administrators seeking to support service-learning. I also believe the book will be both practical and provocative for graduate and undergraduate students who study service-learning and engage others in service-learning experiences inside and outside the formal curriculum. To my international colleagues: I have certainly learned much from you and highlighted some of your outstanding service-learning work in this book. In return, I hope that you will benefit from lessons we have learned here in the U. S.

As **faculty members new to service-learning**, you will learn how service-learning is different from other forms of experiential learning, how to engage students in reflection, the fundamentals of community partnerships, how various curricular models work, how service-learning can be used in a wide variety of disciplines, and how to assess it. **Faculty members with some knowledge of service-learning** will find information on the unique elements of a good service-learning syllabus, how to ensure academic rigor, how to engage diverse students and students who may be resistant, how to sustain community partnerships, how service-learning works in the online environment, and how to highlight service-learning in tenure and promotion

portfolios. **Faculty members with considerable service-learning experience** will find it beneficial to revisit some of its fundamentals as well as to engage along with me about some of the complex dilemmas of service-learning, such as: How can we prevent service-learning from perpetuating the status quo? How can I move students beyond service-learning to lifelong civic and political engagement? Should the focus of service-learning be local or global? How can we become a community-engaged academic department?

      Leaders and staff members of service-learning or civic engagement centers seek guidance when we find ourselves, as I did, in the position of making strategic decisions about the sustainability, growth, and direction of service-learning at our institutions. Most of you are also responsible for providing development and support to both new and experienced service-learning faculty and student affairs professionals. Often staff members of service-learning centers are young and new or relatively new to the field, without much program development or teaching experience. You are frequent participants in my service-learning workshops. You always ask me for resources you can use to strategically plan for the future development of your programs and to train and assist the faculty, staff, and students who facilitate service-learning on your campuses. This volume will answer your questions and provide the resources you need to accomplish these tasks well.

      Many colleagues who do **faculty professional development** have told me that they are experienced as faculty members but lack knowledge of, and experience with, service-learning. Particularly at institutions that do not have a service-learning center, you often have the same questions and needs for resources as service-learning center staff in regard to providing faculty development and support for service-learning. You frequently find yourselves charged with promoting high-impact educational practices like service-learning. I see this occurring with more

urgency as more institutions are revising their core curricula to incorporate additional active learning experiences for students. This book will serve as the primary resource for faculty professional development as you promote service-learning as a high-impact, engaged-learning practice.

Student affairs professionals in all functional areas use cocurricular service-learning to achieve our goals for student development. I am one of you. Those of you who work in residence halls can develop a strong sense of community among your residents by engaging them in ongoing service-learning and accompanying reflection. By adding service-learning experiences to orientation, program leaders can introduce new students to the community around the campus and to the concept and practice of experiential learning, while providing opportunities for the students to build relationships with one other. For those whose work focuses on multicultural outcomes, service-learning is an excellent way to provide opportunities for students to work productively with people who are different from themselves and to engage in reflection about human difference and commonality. Professionals who work with students who have violated the code of conduct often require them to do compensatory community service together with reflection on what it means to be a member of a community. Service-learning can make these experiences more meaningful for the students and more beneficial for community organizations. **Campus ministers** heighten the religious or spiritual dimension of discourse and reflection by engaging students in cocurricular and curricular service-learning. I also hope this volume will be helpful to my colleagues in our professional associations, ACPA – College Student Educators International and NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. I am pleased that both organizations have established learning communities related to service-learning and civic engagement.

A rapidly growing audience for this book is **leadership educators**. More and more of us involved in leadership education are focusing squarely on leadership for social change. As a result we are seeking to integrate service-learning into both curricular and cocurricular initiatives. I hope this book will augment the existing resources through the National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs and other organizations for leadership educators and encourage you to engage students in service-learning to enable them to develop essential competencies for socially responsible leadership.

In order to secure the future of service-learning at the institutional and national levels, **campus administrators** must play an active role. Presidents and senior officers for academic affairs, student affairs, finance, institutional advancement, and development need to understand why and how service-learning deserves and needs support from each of their perspectives. You will discover the value of service-learning to students, communities, and the institution. You will also learn about the complex issues that the faculty and staff who report to them encounter and how to support their efforts.

I have thought much about **graduate and undergraduate students** as I composed this book. I hope it will be useful to graduate students in higher education and student affairs as you explore service-learning as a pedagogy, practice, and philosophy. I look forward to hearing more of your profound questions and to wrestling with you about the challenges and dilemmas our work presents. I also hope that this book will well serve undergraduate and graduate students in the growing number of courses and programs that focus on service-learning, civic and community engagement, and philanthropy and nonprofit leadership. The Center for Engaged Democracy at Merrimack College lists majors, minors, and certificate programs at colleges and

universities around the country. These programs are valuable because they not only engage students in service-learning; they also study and critique it.

Overview of the Contents

In addition to answering some of the most frequent and challenging questions about service-learning, this book also serves as a "one-stop shop" for the best and most current resources for further information. Its exhibits and extensive references are supplemented by sources of additional information that are provided for most of the questions.

The first chapter describes the background and fundamentals of service-learning in higher education, including its theoretical foundations, history, and current state of practice. Chapter Two addresses service-learning's essential element of critical reflection, including definitions, best practices, and how to implement high-quality reflection in both curricular and cocurricular settings. Chapter Three is about developing strong, reciprocal campus-community partnerships for service-learning. It highlights the principles that encourage high-quality partnerships, the multiple types of partnerships, what it takes to start and sustain them, and how service-learning partnerships can stimulate broader and deeper institutional engagement.

Chapter Four serves as a thorough guide to designing and teaching service-learning courses in many forms and disciplines. It also offers practical advice for individuals who seek to motivate and support faculty to practice service-learning. Cocurricular service-learning is the focus of Chapter Five, including its relationship to student development and leadership education, how it can be integrated into various areas of student affairs, and how to support student-led service-learning.

Chapter Six is all about assessment and the critical role it plays in understanding the impacts of service-learning on students, communities, and institutions. The myriad and

sometimes thorny details of the administration of service-learning, including risk management, are covered in Chapter Seven. It also addresses how to get started with service-learning, the components and organizational location of service-learning centers, additional institutional infrastructure that is required, and funding.

Chapter Eight, the most intriguing chapter, delves into the deep, unsettled questions of service-learning. It is only through critical consideration of the complex dilemmas that service-learning engenders that we can incorporate its fundamental principles into our practice as we continuously question and challenge their relevance as service-learning evolves to meet changing local and global needs. The ninth and final chapter examines strategies for securing the future of service-learning in higher education and for reaping what I believe to be its virtually limitless benefits for all its participants and stakeholders.

The Author

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Jacoby has served as Campus Compact's Engaged Scholar for Professional Development. In addition, she is Senior Scholar for the National Clearinghouse for Commuter

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She received her Ph.D. from the University of Maryland in French Language and Literature in 1978. She is Affiliate Associate Professor in the Department of Higher Education and Student Affairs, where she teaches doctoral and undergraduate courses.

Her publications include six books: *The Student as Commuter: Developing a Comprehensive Institutional Response* (ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Reports, 1989), *Service-Learning in Higher Education: Concepts and Practices* (Jossey-Bass, 1996), *Involving Commuter Students in Learning* (Jossey-Bass New Directions for Higher Education, 2000), *Building Partnerships for Service-Learning* (Jossey-Bass, 2003), *Civic Engagement in Higher Education: Concepts and Practices* (Jossey-Bass, 2009), and *Looking In, Reaching Out: A Reflective Guide for Community Service-Learning Professionals* (Campus Compact, 2010).

Jacoby was a member of the Board of Directors of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education from 1980 to 2011. She has held many leadership positions in NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education and ACPA – College Student Educators International. Her institution and professional associations have recognized her outstanding work on behalf of service-learning and commuter students. She received the 2010 Maryland Campus Compact Scholarship Award, is an ACPA Diamond Honoree, and currently serves as an ACPA Senior Scholar. Jacoby writes and consults extensively and makes numerous speeches and presentations across the U.S. and around the world, both in person and online.

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