

Adopting Service-Learning in Universities around the World

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ADOPTING SERVICE-LEARNING IN UNIVERSITIES AROUND THE WORLD

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Abstract

In the United States service-learning has proven to be an effective means both for education and for community development. It seems logical to assume that service-learning would be similarly effective in other countries. However, universities in other countries operate quite differently from universities in the U.S. Discussions with professors from the former Soviet Union and Southeast Europe produced a list of obstacles to transferring service-learning to other countries. The paper suggests some ways to reduce the obstacles. As service-learning is implemented in universities around the world, universities will probably change their methods of operation to permit the use of this effective teaching method.

Introduction

Service-learning is a new educational method that is expanding the involvement of universities in their neighboring communities. It also tends to promote the civic and moral development of students. Service-learning can be defined as “service performed by students, aimed at attending to a real need of the community, and oriented in an explicit and planned way to enhance the quality of academic learning.” (Tapia, *et al.*, 2006, p. 68) This paper explains what service-learning is, how it is consistent with the history of universities in general and particularly universities in the U.S. with their focus on applied knowledge. The paper describes how service-learning has developed in the U.S. and then considers whether universities in other countries might also adopt service-learning as an educational method. Interviews with professors from southeast Europe and the former Soviet Union reveal that there are obstacles to the adoption of service-learning in some countries. The paper suggests some steps than can be taken to reduce these obstacles.

What Service-Learning is

Service-learning is “a multi-faceted pedagogy that crosses all levels of schooling, has potential relevance to all academic and professional disciplines, is connected to a range of dynamic social issues, and operates within a broad range of community contexts.” (Furco and Billig, 2002, pp. vii-viii)

Service-learning is not simply a pedagogy. Rather, service-learning is a means to empower students and educational institutions to become more aware of the needs of the communities of which they are a part and to become engaged and civically active in mutually beneficial ways. Community-based service that relates to course and curricular content is becoming increasingly embedded in curricula. Evidence is beginning to show that service-learning has not only begun to transform education, but it also has transformed the lives of many of the students involved. (Casey, *et al.*, 2006, p. xi)

Common service-learning activities are the following: Middle school students (11-14 years old) may help to clean up a part of the city and then write essays about keeping the city clean or the importance of caring for the environment. High school students (15-18 years old) sometimes help to deliver meals to elderly or terminally ill people and then write essays on what life is like for people in different stages of life. Graduate students in management may work in teams of 3 to 5 as consultants to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government agencies or businesses. These projects are the “laboratory” part of a management course. The client is a second instructor. Students have an opportunity to observe an organization while helping the organization to improve its processes. Students write a paper in which they describe the work they did and use as many concepts from the course as they can, thereby connecting the concepts in the textbook with their personal experiences.

A service experience should be personally meaningful and beneficial to the community. In addition there should be clearly identified learning objectives, student involvement in selecting or designing the service activity, a theoretical base, integration of the service experience with the academic curriculum and opportunities for student reflection. (Furco and Billig, 2002, pp. 7-8)

Individuals may cognitively process knowledge in one of four ways: personal experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualizations, or active experimentations. Based on their personalities, individuals may prefer one learning style over another. A major strength of service-learning projects is that they contain both personal experiences and reflective opportunities. Thus students are likely to be responsive to service-learning activities regardless of their learning style. (Lester, *et al.*, 2005, p. 279)

Three reasons can be given for encouraging service-learning: aid the community, more effective learning and moral development. Advocates of service-learning argue that a key value of service lies in its ability to foster heightened moral awareness. Service-learning projects expose students to community needs. Service activities are an opportunity to infuse the message that organizations can “do well by doing good.” Service-learning experiences, therefore can be seen as an instructional technique that encourages individuals to be socially responsible and engage in moral actions. (Lester, *et al.*, 2005, p. 279)

An Historical Commitment to Community Service

Universities have a long history of making important contributions to their surrounding communities. European universities emerged in decentralized medieval society and became more widespread in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries due in part to actions by city authorities and regional authorities. Universities were supported because of the recognition that the growth and dissemination of knowledge was of value to the community. (Florax, 1992, pp. 275-276)

The U.S. has a tradition of people organizing efforts to serve public interests. In his famous nineteenth century study of American society, de Tocqueville noted Americans' habit of forming voluntary associations to advance their own and the community's interests. DeTocqueville suggested that such associations were crucial to the vitality of American society, pointing out that their activities served to shape the participants' recognition of the coincidence of personal and public interest, which he called "the principle of interest rightly understood". (Pritchard, 2002, p. 4)

Universities in the U.S. have been said to engage in the three activities of education, research and service. In the U.S. the service activity took a new form with the agricultural and engineering extension services of mid-western universities which were established under the Morrill Act in 1862. Under this act the federal government gave land to the states. The states were to sell the land and use the money to buy stocks which would generate perpetual income to support the university. The universities were to teach students, conduct research on improved methods, and communicate the results of research directly to farmers and businessmen through "extension agents." Extension agents were similar to traveling salesmen for new agricultural and engineering methods. Hence, the role of universities in providing service to society beyond simply educating the next generation has a long history. However, service-learning as a method of instruction in undergraduate and graduate education is a rather recent invention.

Increased attention to service in the educational curriculum arises at a time when modern industrial economies have become more knowledge intensive. Universities are important social institutions that contribute to economic growth. So, combining education, research and service, rather than keeping them separate is arising in part due to an effort to couple the knowledge creating activities of the university more closely to the community.

"From community colleges to major research universities, relations to surrounding communities are central to the higher educational agenda. The institutions of higher education profiled in this book are using various strategies to revitalize local neighborhoods while concurrently fulfilling some aspect of their educational mission." (Maurrasse, 2001, p. 181) Service-learning is one example of this heightened commitment to community service.

One indication of the spread of service-learning in the U.S. is the growth in membership of Campus Compact, which was founded in the mid 1980s by the presidents of three universities – Brown University, Georgetown University and Stanford University. Their intent was to persuade the presidents of other universities to encourage faculty, students

and staff to engage in service activities. The “compact” is a statement that university presidents are asked to sign. If the president signs, that university becomes a member of Campus Compact (www.compact.org) and becomes publicly committed to engaging in service-learning activities. Figure 1 shows the growth in the number of university presidents who have signed the compact since 1985.

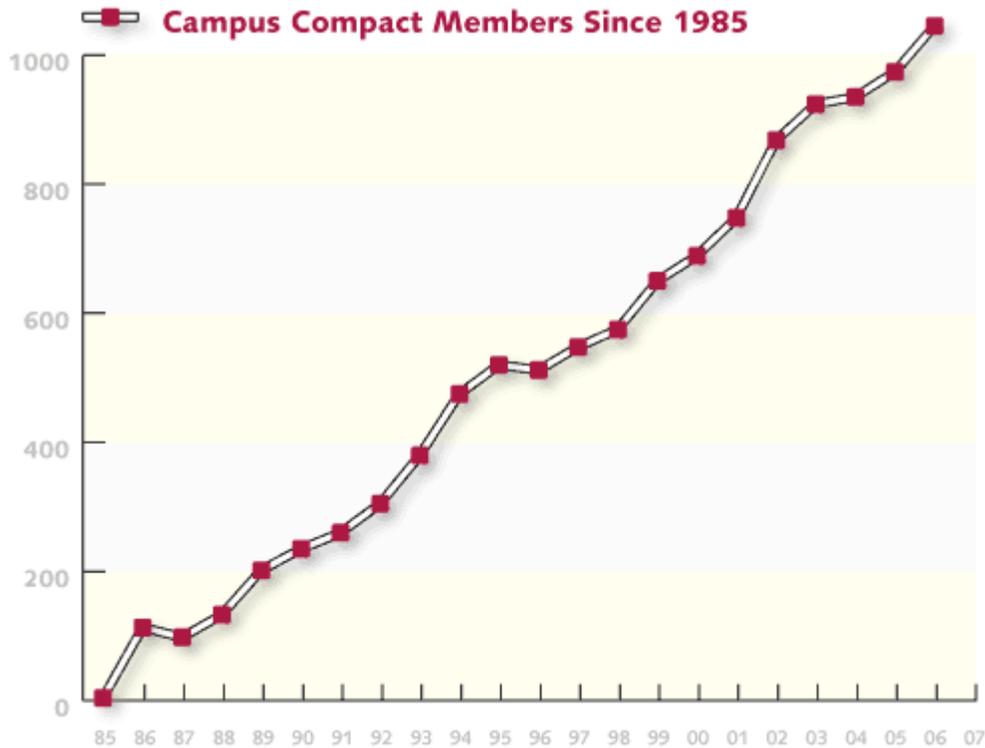


Figure 1: The Growth of Campus Compact

The American Emphasis on Applied Knowledge

Service-learning can be seen as an extension of a long-standing commitment in the U.S. to practical knowledge. Some countries emphasize theoretical knowledge to the neglect of applied knowledge. Richard Feynmann, who won a Nobel Prize in physics, described his experience of teaching in Brazil. He was puzzled by why his students could answer some questions quickly and accurately, but other questions, which seemed the same to him, they could not answer at all.

After a lot of investigation, I finally figured out that the students had memorized everything, but they didn't know what anything meant. When they heard “light that is reflected from a medium with an index,” they didn't know that it meant a material such as water... Everything was entirely memorized, yet nothing had been translated into meaningful words. (Feynmann, 1984, pp. 212-213)

Service-learning provides a way of relating textbook assignments and classroom discussions to personal experiences.

Thomas Ehrlich, former president of Indiana University and former chair of Campus Compact, has described a debate over the nature of a liberal education which occurred in the U.S. in the 1930s. On one side was Robert M. Hutchins, president of the University of Chicago and his colleague Mortimer Adler. They argued for focusing the undergraduate curriculum on a selection of “Great Books.” They claimed that the study of the works of major Western thinkers would lead to a set of principles covering all aspects of human life.

On the other side philosopher John Dewey argued that this claim was dangerous because the notion of fixed truths requires a seal of authenticity from some human authority, which leads away from democracy and toward fascism. He also argued that purely intellectual study should not be separated from practical study or from the great practical problems confronting society.

Such separation can only weaken the intellect and undercut the resolution of those problems. Study Aristotle, Plato, Aquinas, and the others, Dewey urged, but recognize that contemporary learning from their writings requires the application of their insights to contemporary issues... At the time of the debate and for most of the next half-century leaders in higher education generally concurred that Hutchins won the argument. The premise of service-learning is.... however, that Dewey was right and Hutchins was wrong. 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. (Ehrlich, 1996, pp. xi-xii)

Service-learning is one of several trends in pedagogy that together mark a shift in undergraduate education from an emphasis on teaching to one on learning. Among the other trends are a focus on problems rather than disciplines, an emphasis on collaborative rather than individual learning,... and careful articulation of learning outcomes coupled with assessment of learning success. (Ehrlich, 1996, p. xiii)

Robert Coles (1993) makes the case for the impact on moral character that derives from community service in conjunction with guided reflection, a necessary ingredient of service. Finally, service-learning can enhance interpersonal skills that are key in most careers – skills such as careful listening, consensus building, and leadership. Dewey wrote that education should be the primary means of social progress, not just a means to develop the intellect for its own sake. Democracy depends on an involved citizenry. Lee Shulman suggested in 1991 that service learning may become the “clinical practice of the liberal arts.” (Ehrlich, 1996, p. xv)

Research on Service-Learning

Service-learning is now being studied from several points of view, depending on the interests of researchers. Key topics that are being discussed concern implementation of service-learning in curricula, methods of implementation, establishment of collaboration with the community, and benefits of service-learning for all parties (students, faculty, community and educational institution).

The motivation of faculty members to adopt service-learning as a method of instruction has been studied by Barbara Holland (2003). She found that there are different sources of faculty motivation. Faculty members might be motivated by personal values, values that inspire their commitment to a life of service, the success of their discipline and the quality of their teaching and research. Hence, service-learning and collaboration with the community can be a result of either individual or professional goals.

Measuring the outcomes of service-learning for the various parties has been attempted by many authors. In their studies, they pay most attention to the outcomes for students. The most difficult to measure or identify are the outcomes for educational institutions. The benefits for the community are obvious. Students do work that would increase the expenses of community organizations, if the work were done by employees, or professionals who were paid for their work. Clearly, both students and client organizations benefit. Some participants benefit more than others but certainly implementation of service-learning as part of a course will have positive impacts on students, faculty, community and educational institutions.

Janet Eyler and her colleagues have summarized the research on service-learning in higher education over the past few years. Among their findings, each of which is annotated with references, are the following:

- Service-learning has a positive effect on student personal development such as sense of personal efficacy, personal identity, spiritual growth, and moral development.
- Service-learning has a positive effect on interpersonal development, the ability to work well with others, and leadership and communication skills.
- Service-learning has a positive effect on reducing stereotypes and facilitating cultural and racial understanding. However, a few studies suggest that service-learning may subvert as well as support course goals of reducing stereotyped thinking and facilitating cultural and racial understanding.
- Service-learning has a positive effect on sense of social responsibility and citizenship skills.
- Students and faculty report that service-learning has a positive impact on students' academic learning.
- Students and faculty report that service-learning improves students' ability to apply what they have learned in the "real world."
- Service-learning participation has an impact on such academic outcomes as demonstrated complexity of understanding, problem analysis, critical thinking, and cognitive development.
- Students engaged in service-learning report stronger faculty relationships than those who are not involved in service-learning.

- Service-learning improves student satisfaction with college.
- Students engaged in service-learning are more likely to graduate.
- Faculty using service-learning report satisfaction with quality of student learning. They report commitment to research. They increasingly integrate service-learning into courses.
- Colleges and universities report that community service positively affects student retention and enhances community relations.
- Communities report satisfaction with student participation and enhanced community relations. (Eyler, *et al.*, 2003, pp. 15-19)

Service-learning in the curriculum can be implemented in several ways. (Enos and Troppe, 1996) In terms of receiving credit, service learning can be a fourth-credit option (add a fourth credit to a regular three-credit course) or a stand-alone module (three credits). Or a service-learning assignment can be part of a normal course. In terms of its place in the curriculum, service-learning can be incorporated into an introductory course, a required course, or an elective course. Service-learning can be included as course clusters, as capstone projects, etc. Each university needs to adjust the implementation of service-learning depending on the field and the abilities of students. Service-learning can be implemented in every field but not in every course.

Establishing partnerships between a university and the community is very important. Partnerships are usually established in three stages: designing partnerships based on values, building collaborative working relationships among partners, and sustaining the partnerships. (Torres and Schaffer, 2000) In many service learning activities students work as individuals on tasks arranged by leaders of non-governmental organizations (NGO) and university administrators. However, in graduate management classes students often do group projects with organizations where one student is employed.

Stages in the Development of Service-Learning in the U.S.

Students and faculty members at U.S. universities have been doing volunteer work with organizations for many years. (Ackoff, 1974) However, service-learning as a teaching method for widespread application is rather recent. The growth of service-learning in the U.S. can be described as passing through several stages.

1. Students have long worked in groups to complete a large assignment. This method of learning is a step beyond lectures, exams, and term papers.
 2. At least by the 1970s students were doing group projects with clients in organizations. By the end of the 1970s many projects conducted by students were not just hypothetical projects or laboratory exercises. Rather, students worked on projects with real clients with real problems.
 3. The term “service-learning” was invented and defined as a pedagogical method.
 4. Books and articles on service learning began to appear in the educational literature.
 5. Articles on service-learning began to appear in discipline-oriented journals.
- Hence, publications about service-learning spread beyond schools of education to the journals of other disciplines.

Extending Service Learning to Other Countries

Some countries are adopting and practicing service-learning as described above. (Tapia, *et al.*, 2006) In addition, U.S. students are now working with overseas clients via the internet. Student projects at The George Washington University (GWU) provide some examples. In the mid 1990s graduate students in business in Washington and in Moscow communicated via email in an effort to identify some possibilities for joint ventures. These contacts were possible because the Russian professor, Pavel Makeyenko, had been a visiting scholar at GWU and knew Stuart Umpleby. A second project between the students of Makeyenko and Umpleby attempted to find a U.S. firm that made management training videos and that would be willing to have them translated and marketed in Russia. (Umpleby and Makeyenko, 2005)

Since about 2000 students have been doing projects with overseas clients. One project involved corruption in hiring practices in the banking industry in Ukraine. The husband of a former visiting professor at GWU was a computer scientist working for a bank in Ukraine. He was not being promoted, but others less capable were. So a GWU student, who had formerly been a lawyer in Bulgaria, wrote a paper of legal advice on how to deal with corruption. The paper benefited from the website of Transparency International. (Umpleby, 2005)

In another project a group of students worked with Somali Television. Somalia at the time was a failed state. For several years it had no government. The government leaders were in Kenya to avoid the chaos in Somalia. But many organizations continued to function, including Somali Television. The owner lived in London. Students worked with the owner on three projects. First, they found a code of journalistic ethics, which began to be used in training the journalists in Somalia. Second, they obtained an organization chart for a television station in Washington, DC, and sent it to the owner in London along with recommendations on how to organize the people working at the station in Somalia. Third, the students explained process improvement methods and provided on-line materials, so the organization could continually improve its processes. (Umpleby, 2005) Figure 2 depicts the evolution of service-learning projects conducted by Umpleby's students.

		Location	
		US	Other Countries
People	Students	1. Students work together on academic projects	3. Students work via email with students overseas
	Clients	2. Students work on group projects with clients in U.S.	4. Students work via email with clients overseas

Figure 2. The Evolution of Service-Learning Projects in the Field of Management

Some Obstacles to Implementing Service-Learning in Other Countries

Since service-learning has been successful in the U.S. both as a pedagogical method and in helping the organizations of civil society, it seems reasonable to ask whether service-learning, if implemented at universities in other countries, would be effective in other countries as well. In Spring 2006 a group of visiting professors from the former Soviet Union and Southeast Europe were asked this question. They described several obstacles to implementing service-learning in their countries. Here are their answers.

Low Faculty Salaries

Faculty salaries in many countries are quite low. Often faculty members need to teach at more than one university to earn money, or they take second or third jobs outside of academia in order to provide for their families. Universities in other countries usually do not have financial resources to encourage faculty members to be innovative in the way they teach. Faculty members often do consulting to make extra money. In countries where academic incomes are low, any activity that looks like consulting is only of interest if it earns income. Usually faculty members do not want to share this work and income with students. Professors may see students as competitors for consulting assignments. To prevent competition professors may argue that students do not yet know the theory and that they need to study for exams. Professors may say that students should focus on learning theory first.

Students Need Money

Frequently internships are part of the educational experience in many countries. However, internships are usually intended to provide business experience, not learning through service with NGOs. Senior students sometimes have an obligatory internship for which they are required to write a report. Internships provide a connection to practice but usually are arranged with financially successful businesses rather than with financially struggling NGOs. However, students may be willing to engage in service-learning with NGOs as a way of gaining experience.

Service-Learning is not Known or Understood in Many Countries

In formerly communist countries, “voluntary activity” usually meant a “work day” or “subotnik,” for example harvesting potatoes or cotton or shoveling snow off roads. Hence, people are likely to have a negative view of service-learning. They may see it as compulsory, uncompensated work. Another problem is that in some countries the selection of clients for service-learning projects may be influenced by political considerations. For example, faculty members and students might be told to work with one political faction and not another. Consequently, historical experience will cause some people to interpret service-learning as a form of unpaid labor to aid the politically powerful.

Faculty motivation could be a big obstacle to implementing service-learning in curricula. Faculty might have a lack of confidence in their skills and knowledge about service-learning. If they have had no experience with service-learning as students, they will be cautious about introducing service-learning in their courses. Accordingly, training of faculty will be required.

Service-learning as a concept and practice is not yet understood by faculty and administrators in other countries. It needs to be explained and demonstrated. Faculty and students may feel that projects would be additional work, both for students and faculty, rather than a new, effective teaching method. Local organizations with which students would work are also unfamiliar with service-learning. Currently the concept and practice will have to be explained. There is very little connection between universities and local organizations in most countries.

In the U.S. the functions of a university are usually defined as education, research, and service. In the Soviet Union universities engaged in education while institutes of the Academy of Science performed research. In many countries “service” is not widely recognized as one of the functions of a university. Widespread acceptance of service as a function of universities will take time. Ideally, the idea of service-learning would be supported by all professors in a department or school. This does not mean that service-learning should be incorporated into all courses. However, it is important to encourage the faculty members who would like to implement service-learning.

The Curriculum Limits What Can Be Done

In many countries the curriculum is designed by the Ministry of Education, not by faculty members at universities. If the curriculum does not include service-learning, a faculty member can add it only as an additional requirement. In addition there are often obstacles not in how courses are taught, but in the curriculum for a degree. Sometimes the curriculum consists only of required courses. Hence, there is no room in the curriculum for innovative courses that involve service-learning. Faculty members frequently do not have freedom to design curricula. And students sometimes do not have elective courses they can take.

Companies choose the best students for internships. This practice prods students to study and make good grades. Students strive to have internships with businesses in order to earn money and to find jobs after graduation, not to do service with NGOs. Therefore, the ways that students are motivated to study may be in conflict with service-learning.

The Way Courses are Taught Constrains Teaching Methods

In some countries students do not decide until the end of the course whether they want to take the test in the course. Often students just listen to lectures and do not seek credit for the course by taking the test. This means that students are not committed to doing the work in the course until the end of the semester. This arrangement means students cannot be required to do projects during the semester.

Strategies for Removing the Obstacles

Perhaps in coming years universities around the world will adopt as part of their mission working with organizations in the local community. This may be done in part to achieve greater learning and enhanced moral development by students, but also because a university is a key resource for social change and improvement. The functions of a university would then be defined as education, research, and service.

To increase the amount of service-learning done in a university it is necessary to provide support in the form of help with logistics, planning, evaluation and communication. Also, more universities can be encouraged to adopt service-learning as a teaching method by creating an organization like Campus Compact in each country.

Establishing strong, stable relationships with the local community and partnerships with institutions is crucial. Without collaboration with people in the local community it is not possible to implement any kind of service-learning.

Creating incentives and rewards for faculty members is very important for successful motivation, particularly in countries where faculty members must work more than one job to support their families. Creating a positive image of faculty engaged in service-learning is important.

To remove obstacles in the curriculum special courses that include a service-learning component could be created. In these courses students would commit to the course at the beginning of the semester. Perhaps someday service-learning will be added to the Bologna Process.

Service Learning at Different Stages of Country Development

Zhelyu Vladimirov (2006) has suggested that service-learning will be interpreted differently depending on the stage of development of a country. He lists the key concerns at different stages of country development.

1. Basic survival. Faculty members will work on service-learning only if they are paid to do so.
2. Internships for students. Students need income as well as faculty. Faculty may supervise internships to help students.
3. Consulting jobs for faculty. Faculty motivation is provided by the possibility of supplementary income in the future for work as a consultant.
4. Alumni groups may start service projects. In more prosperous societies alumni may contribute money to universities for scholarships for students.

Cultural Differences and Service-Learning

When an early version of this paper was presented at a conference on Community Research and Learning at American University in Washington, DC, on April 29, 2006, a

question was raised about cultural differences. It was suggested that perhaps community service is done differently in different countries. For example, the concept of service-learning may be the way that people in individualist countries help others. In collectivist societies people may help others through ties of family, community, religion, or tribe. This is an important observation. The answer for the moment is that when service-learning is described to people from collectivist societies, and they are asked whether such activities exist in their countries, they have replied that service-learning is not used as a pedagogical method for the reasons described above. Service-learning can be adopted either as a way of helping the local community or as an effective teaching method or both.

Conclusion

Service-learning is a new pedagogical method which is spreading rapidly in some countries. Research shows that it improves the effectiveness of education and has a beneficial effect on students' sense of social responsibility. The work that students do is beneficial to neighboring communities and organizations. However, in some countries educational structures and procedures may impede the adoption of this method of education. This article has identified several of these obstacles and suggested ways of overcoming them. We assume that a more interactive learning model will be increasingly accepted, since it aids learning, is a way for universities to contribute to their communities, and helps to instill democratic values.

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