

2009 CCNCCE Conference Paper

Connecting Scholarship and Action through Service Learning

Presented by:

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General Description of Session:

Two administrators and three faculty members from Raritan Valley and Northampton Community Colleges discuss strategies on how service learning can be incorporated into various disciplines, improving student learning outcomes, and cultivating critical thinking, creativity, and civic engagement. Topics include designing reflection activities to promote academic achievement, personal and professional skills, and community engagement; developing community partnerships; utilizing evaluation and assessment for program improvement. The practical strategies offered demonstrate how to promote student learning through service learning and civic engagement activities, providing a model of how service learning can be incorporated into the curriculum and easily replicated.

Strategies include: identifying service learning activities in collaboration with faculty and community organizations, conducting workshops on the lessons learned for the campus and community, promoting meaningful dialogue among faculty, students and the community, fostering student leadership, and creating initiatives that can be sustained, institutionalized and replicated by other colleges. Handouts, sample syllabi, interactive discussion, and visual aids are included.

Motivations/foundations for the session:

One of the highest statements of both Colleges' purpose is reflected in their mission statement, which articulates its core values and highlights its commitment to the community:

The Mission of Raritan Valley Community College is to create a community of learners who value intellectual achievement, scholarship, diversity of thought, leadership, and service to the community. Our culture supports an environment that is committed to student success, workforce development, life-long learning, and responsible citizenship. Our quality, open-access and affordable rigorous programs provide a gateway to education for our community (2002).

Northampton Community College Mission: Recognizing that students are the primary reason that Northampton Community College exists, we seek to provide excellent, accessible and comprehensive learning experiences in partnership with the dynamic, diverse communities that we serve (2007).

Educating for citizenship is central to the mission and teaching of RVCC and NCC and service learning is a fundamental part of their curriculum and broader community. Clearly, service learning contributes to the advancement of the institutions' mission.

An important intended outcome is curriculum development that increases the quantity and quality of student service learning. According to Driscoll et al. (1996), service learning enhances students' academic achievement, personal development, awareness of community involvement, and sensitivity to diversity. Eyer & Giles (1999) also report increased learning in problem analysis and critical thinking skills when service and academic study are linked. Through service learning experiences, students can combine theory with practice, witnessing first-hand what they read about in textbooks and hear during lectures. Furthermore, Osborne (1998) found in a random study on service learning's effect on students that those participating in service

learning showed significant positive improvements in social competency, perceived ability to work with diverse people, and self-worth in social situations.

Understanding about what is to be achieved at the session:

Learning Outcomes:

- Identify theoretical concepts of service learning in the classroom.
- Outline methods that promote academic success, civic responsibility and engagement as well as professional, personal and social life skills.
- Examine methods of effective student reflection.
- Discuss strategies that establish community partnerships which improve learning outcomes.
- Propose projects which will incorporate theoretical knowledge in a community based setting.
- Share techniques that evaluate achievement of learning outcomes.

Drawing on the interest and expertise of faculty from diverse disciplines is part of an on-going recruitment effort, and building a critical mass of faculty involvement from different disciplines is part of the planning process. These efforts have engaged faculty from different disciplines who offer students either optional or required optional service learning projects.

Examples of projects are:

Child Developmental Psychology: Students work individually in service learning locations and utilize their understanding of cognitive, psychosocial, and physical development throughout the lifespan to elaborate on their experiences. Students utilize theorists such as Kohlberg, Piaget, and Vygotsky to investigate their interactions with their placements on a more global level. This is done through papers and group discussions throughout the semester.

Introduction to Psychology: Students investigate the organization with which they interact and explore the usage of the population needs with curriculum objectives. Students utilize the non-profit missions of their placements to explore theorists such as Maslow, Rogers, and other

humanists. This is done through the use of group and individual reflection projects throughout the semester.

Trends in Nursing: Students work in groups of five to research a topic related to health care targeted for specific populations such as the elderly, pregnant women, and young children.

Students then match their findings with particular community organizations needing assistance and collaborate with organization staff to develop a service project. The final products and services developed are disseminated to the larger community through workshops, information brochures, fact sheets, and training sessions. Service learning is 60% of the students' final grade.

Sociology: One of the great challenges for faculty is to help students interconnect the concepts they learn in different disciplines. Environmental topics are by nature interdisciplinary, and can be used to bridge course outcomes between disciplines. This activity explored how environmentally themed service learning projects can be used to help students connect information across disciplines. Sociology and Biology students volunteered their time at a local community farm through a partnership with a local organization, Cherry Valley CSA.

An important goal for in the development of our service learning programs is to work with the local community, and a major effort is focused on creating new service learning opportunities, identifying new partnerships and deepening existing relationships with community organizations. There are many advantages of partnerships between social service organizations and colleges. According to Jacoby (1996), the connections created by service learning students allow for further collaborations between the college and community, creating additional service-learning sites for students. Moreover, faculty members can discover new opportunities for research and teaching that address community needs. As students develop service learning

projects, ties are strengthened with community organizations, and faculty members take a special interest in particular organizations and their goals. These stronger connections often help faculty discover new opportunities for research and teaching. Kendall, Duley, Little, Permaul, and Rubin (1986) suggest that in addition to the enhancement of teaching that results from service learning, faculty also receive the benefit of taking on the new role of facilitator, experiencing the excitement of students becoming active participants in learning, and may therefore develop community contacts.

Other information for participants:

A recent development is the creation of a service learning regional network among five community colleges: Raritan Valley CC in New Jersey, Northampton and Montgomery CC's in PA, and Kingsborough and Queensborough CC's in New York. With the assistance of funding from a Learn and Serve grant, the regional network is working collaboratively to help social service organizations on a broader scale. Project activities have been developed among the colleges to champion the advancement of service learning and extend its benefits in addressing the academic and social success for the disadvantaged. New strategies are bringing other community colleges and social service organizations into an expanding network; increasing the number of faculty who learn ways to revise curriculum and incorporate service learning projects that focus on the target population; providing the opportunity for faculty from the different institutions to meet other faculty who can share syllabi, ideas and practices in addressing important issues.