

Sally C. Tannenbaum, ed. *Research, Advocacy, and Political Engagement: Multidisciplinary Perspectives through Service Learning*. Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2008.

Review by Michel M. Haigh

*R*esearch, Advocacy, and Political Engagement: Multidisciplinary Perspectives through Service Learning explores service-learning projects in a variety of content areas. This is a volume in Service Learning for Civic Engagement, a series instigated by two educational movements: civic engagement and integrative learning. Volumes focus on specific social issues (gender and power, race and immigration, community health, and political engagement). Most of the contributors to the series are from the California State University system (CSU). CSU has created a system of service-learning offices, conferences, and courses; in 2005, it offered more than 1,800 service-learning courses to 65,000 students. Gerald Eisman serves as the overall series editor.

This volume on research, advocacy, and political engagement is edited by Sally Cahill Tannenbaum, an associate professor of communications at California State University, Fresno. The thirteen chapters are presented as a “how to” or step-by-step guide on ways to include service-learning projects in a variety of classes (e.g., political campaigns, business, communications, research methods). The authors, all from the CSU system, provide the reader with detailed plans. They explain how the classes are structured; how the project is included in the curriculum; the role of the students in the project; and the end result from the student perspective. For the teacher who wants to learn how to include a service-learning project in his or her class, this book provides a plan, including example syllabi, and relevant literature as well as detailed explanations of the projects. The book is divided into four sections: traditional approaches to political engagement, a business perspective (economics class and entrepreneurship class examples), social activism, and K-12 outreach.

Something unique in this book is its Activity/Methodology table summarizing each project. The table includes information about class size, type of community partner engaged, and the methodology or pedagogy employed. The overall conclusion? Students enjoy service-learning experiences. Students report that the projects help explicate class concepts and theories, engage them in a constructive use of time and energy, and provide a service to the local community. Students find the experiences a way to learn in addition to lectures, tests, and homework assignments. Before students

are involved in community-based research, the instructors spend time training them on research practices, and most require the students to complete Institutional Review Board training for ethical practices in social science research. A few of the chapters are described briefly below in order to provide more concrete examples of the projects discussed.

The first chapter, by Corey Cook, discusses the lack of literature available explaining the civic value of service-learning experiences. He involved his students in exit poll survey data collection with San Francisco voters in 2004 and 2005. The chapter provides insight into the project, explains the student roles in the project, and offers perceptions about the project from the student point of view.

Tannenbaum's chapter provides the reader with details on how to involve students in a political campaign. Students are required to walk precincts, operate phone banks, and take part in discussions with the local community. They are challenged to gain an understanding about the difficulties of motivating disenfranchised populations to vote, and how fund raising plays a part in political campaigns. Students participate in discussions with political consultants and candidates. They reflect on their experiences in a number of ways, including presentations and essays.

Greg Hunter challenges upper-division economics students to apply cost-benefit analysis to a political policy change. Hunter provides instructions on how his students select a local policy under consideration for change. The students investigate the policy and then present their findings to the community members who will be affected by the policy change. "By learning how the cost-benefit numbers are calculated and dealing with the inherent uncertainty over these numbers, students are in a powerful position to engage in the political process in a way that is rarely used by the average citizen" (p. 79).

Ann Marie Todd and Deanna Fassett encourage students to understand how local advocacy groups are involved in the democratic process. "Studying how protests, social movements, and dissent have transformed global society can provide students with an understanding of democratic participation" (p. 106). The students write journals, portfolios, and reflection papers to document their experiences. The first part of the course discusses the theoretical basis of social movements. Next, students examine documents from historical social movements (e.g., civil rights, women's suffrage, or radical environmentalism), and trace the connections between historical movements and contemporary struggles. They

also observe and analyze the advocacy group's activities throughout their observation semester. Todd and Fassett provide the reader a copy of their syllabus as well as a grading rubric.

Mary Kirlin stresses the importance of civic skills, including communication, organization, critical thinking, and collective decision-making. She says adults are engaged because they are motivated, are connected to decision makers, and have the skills necessary to participate. In order to develop these skills, her students select a problem they think "needs to be fixed," do research in order to understand the situation and the problem, and then act (e.g., by writing letters, giving presentations, and interacting with decision makers) in order to fix the problem. The most important part of the experience is the reflection papers that the students write. "Reflection also allows students to express their frustrations and ideally guides them toward a learning experience" (p. 194).

Kristeen Pemberton works with student teachers in a social studies methods class. She states that "there is a need to provide opportunities for teacher candidates to reflect on the changing contexts in which they will be teaching children . . . to investigate their potential to be agents of change" (p. 198). Using service-learning allows students to apply their knowledge, develop an understanding of how they can use these types of projects in their classes, and gain an appreciation of how service-learning encourages political and civic engagement.

In conclusion, this book is a "how to" or step-by-step guide on ways to include service-learning projects in university classes. An overall theme is that the teachers enjoy including service-learning projects in their classes, and the students enjoy working on these projects. In order for the students to really understand the experience, instructors need to include assignments allowing the students to reflect on the process and the project. For teachers who need advice and guidance on including service-learning in their classes, this book provides detailed information. This book is for the novice, and not for someone who has tried service-learning as a teaching tool before. A novice will find the cases and ideas interesting, detailed, and extremely helpful. If a reader has experience in service-learning pedagogy, and is looking for new literature, this book will not aid them in that quest. This book does not substantively expand the literature on the philosophy, theory, and practice of service-learning, including the role and significance of service-learning as engaged scholarship, and as a vehicle for fostering civic professionalism and democracy. However, as a "how-to" guide—the explicit purpose of this volume—it is quite valuable.

About the Reviewer

Michel M. Haigh is an assistant professor in the College of Communications at the Pennsylvania State University. She employs service-learning activities in both her public relations writing and campaigns classes each semester.