The Community College Service-Learning Movement: Successes and Challenges

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This essay describes the service-learning efforts of the Community College of Aurora (Colorado) and two national projects funded through the Corporation for National Service *Learn and Serve America: Higher Education*, whose objective is to help to develop a national service-learning movement among community colleges. The author then comments on lessons learned regarding furthering the national service-learning movement and draws tentative conclusions regarding the need for further collaboration between community-college and four-year service-learning initiatives.

Service learning at the Community College of Aurora

CCA's service-learning program grew out of several grant activities, a Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) Curricular Integration of Ethics project (1989-92), American Association of Community College (AACC) Kellogg Beacon Civic Responsibility Project (1992-94), and seed funds from the Colorado Campus Compact from the Corporation for National Service.

As CCA was completing its FIPSE project involving 80 faculty members in integrating ethics into their courses, the college became interested in the notion of students participating in service in the community (Parsons & Lisman 1996). Integrating ethics discussions into courses seemed insufficient to combat student egoistic and relativistic attitudes. CCA faculty hoped that getting students involved in community service would help them become more ethically connected.

CCA's AACC Civic Responsibility project enabled the development of a service-learning program. A dozen faculty integrated service learning into their courses, and CCA assisted in the development of curricular integration of ethics and service programs at six community colleges in Toronto, Canada; Colorado; Hawaii; Kansas; Maryland; and Virginia.

At CCA, approximately thirty-five faculty members currently offer service learning in their courses in an average of 20 courses per semester. The Service-Learning Program operates a clearinghouse to assist students and faculty in service placement. CCA's program has several initiatives:

- The Service-Learning Program operates a mentoring program with Aurora Public Schools, as a result of a two-year Kellogg Grant (1994-96) for the Aurora Public School/CCA Youth Service Teams Project. College students take a special-topics sociology course and serve as mentors of Aurora Public Middle-School children who work together in community-service projects as an intersession activity for two middle schools that have become year-round schools. The groups of students serve at homeless shelters, nursing homes, elementary schools, and city parks.

- CCA also received several ColoradoCorps members to support the service-learning office for 1994-96. The ColoradoCorps is an AmeriCorps funded directly from the Corporation for National Service and administrated by the Colorado Campus Compact.

- CCA's Service Learning Program was selected as one of four national sites by the Humphrey Institute's Center for Democracy and Citizenship, directed by Harry Boyte, author of *Commonwealth*. Eight faculty participated in this project during the 1995-96 academic year in developing civic-responsibility themes in their service-learning courses.

CCA's service-learning initiative has enabled faculty and students to see connections to the community and helped the college increase its understanding of what it means for a community college to be completely engaged with the community. The college wished to avoid creating a service-learning program at CCA that only placed students with social agencies, fearing that such a program would wind up perpetuating the very problems that faculty and students hoped to eliminate through service-learning. Consequently, through its Community Involvement Program, CCA is beginning to develop a number of efforts aimed at providing a structure of community-service experiences to help address problems systemically.

The two most prominent of these efforts are:

- *Lowry Family Center.* The CCA Lowry Family Center serves low-income individuals, including 84 formerly homeless families. In addition to referral services, family members take GED (General Education Diploma) and parenting classes, and their children receive tutoring. The family center links to the college's fast-track training program, providing jobs ranging from $6 to $12 per hour, enabling people to move from welfare to work. In addition, CCA has a small and home-based business program and a worker cooperative development program, offering further opportunities for these and other individuals. Service-learning students in the para-legal and criminal-justice program are providing informational classes and referral support at the family center.

- *Community Self-Leadership Project.* The most recent initiative under development is a demonstration project that is part of the

Kellogg Colorado Community College Occupational and Educational System, directed by Dr. Michael Briand. Four faculty members will receive community leadership training and then serve as mentors of members of a number of community-based organizations including churches, neighborhood associations, family centers, and an Hispanic organization; their members, in turn, participate in leadership training. Following the training, these faculty members and service-learning students will work with community members to help to design projects that improve community life.

The National Community College Initiatives

The AACC Learn and Serve initiative, "Service-Learning and Community Colleges: Building a National Network"

The AACC Learn and Serve initiative, "Service-Learning and Community Colleges: Building a National Network," began in 1994 (Barnett, 1995b). This project, in its third year, grew out of the AACC Kellogg Beacon Project and was directly influenced by the CCA Civic Responsibility project (Barnett, 1995a). The overall purpose of this project "is to develop the infrastructure of community colleges for service learning." AACC provided grants for eight community colleges in Hawaii, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Montana, New York, and Ohio to develop and expand their service-learning programs. (During year two, three other community colleges joined the project.)

In addition, a team of six individuals from four colleges served as mentors; the author was chairman of this mentor group. Each year the mentors meet at the beginning of the year to engage in strategic planning. During the year a mentor makes a consultative visit to his or her assigned campus, and the entire group convenes for an evaluation meeting in Scottsdale, Arizona, during the National Campus Compact Center for Community College annual Service-Learning Conference.

One of the objectives of the project has been to develop a service-learning clearinghouse for community colleges. As part of this activity the AACC Survey on Community Service and Service-Learning Programs in Community Colleges was distributed in 1995 to more than 1,100 community colleges. Barnett (1995c) reports:

Seven hundred nineteen colleges responded. Replies were received from college presidents, administrative and academic deans, faculty members, and student services staff. Two hundred eighteen institutions in 41 states—a full 30 percent of respondents—reported offering service-learning in a variety of courses. Even more encouraging was the response from an additional 45 percent of colleges, which are interested in starting service-learning on their campuses (AACC Survey Report, 1996).

As an example of the impact of the program, 1,129 students performed 24,144 hours of direct community service during September 1 and December 31, 1995 (Barnett, 1996). Service-learning activities include the following. Kapi'olani Community College students in their Hawaiian community collected oral histories from

senior citizens, providing meaningful activities for the elderly and building important relationships among seniors and students. Prestonsburg Community College students provided service to 110 community-based organizations, including 29 family resources centers that are primarily school-based, allowing for easy accessibility to a variety of services for rural Kentucky residents. Hocking Technical College nursing students taught local fourth graders in Ohio the importance of nutrition. Montana's Flathead Valley Community College science and biology classes launched a major environmental initiative, including a waste-stream audit and plans for a major effort to reduce the negative impacts of solid waste in the community (Barnett 1996).

During year two of the project each "mentee college" was the host of a statewide or regional service-learning conference involving as many as one hundred colleges. The success of the AACC Learn and Serve project has led to AACC's new five-year grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to educate community-college students on preventing HIV/AIDS and other serious diseases.

The Faculty Role:
From the Margin to the Mainstream Project

In 1994 Arizona's Maricopa Community College District/Mesa Community College and Campus Compact funded the RAND Corporation to assess the Compact National Center for Community Colleges (CCNCCC) and provide recommendations for planning. As a result of the 1994 report, *Future Directors for the Campus Compact Center for Community Colleges,* the CCNCCC received funding from the Corporation for National Service *Learn and Serve America: Higher Education* to launch "The Faculty Role: From the Margin to the Mainstream Project" (Pickeral & Peters 1996, p. 4). The major goal of the project "is to facilitate the successful integration of principles of good service-learning practice into faculty development and the academic curriculum" (Pickeral & Peters 1996, p. 4). During year one of the project, five faculty members were engaged to serve as regional representatives. Pickeral and Peters (1996) write:

> This trained cadre of service-learning faculty work
> with three constituencies: (1) a group of faculty on
> each of their own campuses; (2) faculty . . . ten
> campuses within each of their assigned regions; and
> (3) faculty they impact through state, regional, and
> national workshops and conferences. In addition,
> the project is committed to developing and
> distributing high-quality service-learning resources
> that establish standards of good practice, campus
> integration models, and strategies to integrate
> service-learning into the academic core of the
> academy (p. 4).

Faculty members include the author and representatives of community colleges in Arizona, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Ohio, and

Rhode Island. Faculty bring somewhat different strengths to this project, ranging from focusing on the pedagogical aspects of service learning, multicultural dimension, community building, civic development, and social activism. However, all members are committed to helping community colleges to develop and expand service-learning programs. Faculty have conducted presentations at national conferences and consultative visits and workshops at community colleges in their regions. During day visits with colleagues and administrators interested in service learning at a college in his or her region, faculty attempt to understand the institutional dynamics, resources, and challenges the institution faces in developing or expanding service learning. Later, the faculty member or an associate will return and conduct a service-learning workshop.

Lessons Learned

Insights into the challenges and possibilities of expanding and deepening the service-learning movement gained by the author and his associates include:

* Faculty respond well to small-group, on-campus interactions, enabling them to share stories, address their concerns, and develop specific service-learning integration strategies (Pickeral & Peters, 94, p. 42).

* Faculty are more receptive to support and assistance from other faculty. Faculty regard their peers as more authentic and appreciative of the struggles to integrate service-learning into the academic curriculum (Pickeral & Peters, 42).

* It is helpful for knowledgeable faculty from other colleges to make campus visits to encourage the development of activities that integrate service-learning into their courses. It also is helpful to offer a variety of follow-up services, including additional visits, written and electronic communication, and interactions at professional and/or service-learning conferences (Pickeral & Peters, 42).

* Faculty are more likely to integrate service-learning into their courses if they feel affinity with other faculty on their campuses. An "outsider" provides an initial opportunity for faculty to come together and helps them realize the benefit of regular interactions (Pickeral & Peters, 42). Senior or tenured faculty should be involved in the service-learning program and should be called upon to mentor other faculty.

* In providing service-learning workshops the basic philosophy of service-learning should be outlined in a straightforward manner. Drawn-out discussions of philosophy are only interesting if time permits discussions of some of the more subtle points (Pickeral & Peters, 43). However, at the same time, faculty should be exposed to the many models of service-learning integration.

* The ideal setting for institutionalization of service learning is situated in solid support by faculty and administration, a process for facilitating student service placements in the community, and formal efforts to help students understand the academic and civic or community relevance of this activity (Pickeral & Peters, 44).

• It is important that service-learning workshops and faculty interaction include discipline-specific discussions (Pickeral & Peters, 44). The forthcoming monograph series discussed by Edward Zlotkowski in this journal should be immensely helpful in this regard.

• Faculty-guided reflection is critical to a good service-learning program. "As service changes the traditional classroom, it also changes the way a teacher assesses student learning. If faculty incorporate service without changing the way they assess student performance and learning, they may reduce the impact the service experience has on students" (Pickeral & Peters, 44).

The Future of Service Learning in Higher Education

It is apparent that we are in the midst of a true higher-education service-learning reform movement. The National Campus Compact statistics estimate that 520 Campus Compact-member colleges — between 5,000-10,000 faculty and more than 500,000 students — are involved in this initiative, and many colleges engaged in service learning are not members. Along with the evidence of community college involvement, service learning appears to be sweeping across the country (Kobrin, M., Mareth, J, and Smith, M. 1996). Statistics obviously do not tell the whole story. As one who has visited a great number of campus and participated in countless conferences and conducted many presentations at colleges and universities on service learning, the author has a strong sense of the excitement that faculty and administrators feel about this movement. It is re-energizing teaching and developing strong partnerships between colleges and communities.

However, grounds for concern remain. Unless service learning develops stronger community problem-solving initiatives and civic-development efforts, it is possible that service learning will persist as only a pedagogy. To be sure, this is a powerful pedagogy, enabling students to learn by experience. But it is insufficient that colleges relegate service learning to a form of experiential education. Many educators believe it is important to move beyond providing meaning-ful service-learning experiences for our students at homeless shelters and other agencies serving people in need to marshaling the re-sources of higher education to eliminate or minimize the social conditions that give rise to these kinds of service organizations. Our communities are civically and economically fragmented. As mediat-ing institutions, colleges and universities may be the best hope for helping build strong collaborative partnerships to address economic and civic atrophy (Parsons & Lisman 1996). Meeting this challenge, however, is far from guaranteed and requires several important steps.

• The first step is for colleges and universities to begin to de-velop the kind of community partnerships with community-based organizations and public schools that will serve as conduits for civic and economic initiatives. It is asking too much of faculty to shoulder the sole responsibility for these initiatives. Certainly, faculty will be

essential in all phases of design and deployment of community initiatives, but the college administration must provide support in every way possible.

⊙ Second, as many are saying, the higher-education faculty-reward system must change to encourage faculty to becoming more engaged in their communities. In academia, there is beginning to be considerable discussion concerning Ernest Boyer's concept of public scholarship. Similar ideas have been pursued in a recent volume, *Higher Education Exchange* (Brown 1996).

⊙ Third, two- and four-year institutions have much to gain from working with each other. Too often, four-year institutions have regarded community colleges as the poor stepchild. This is understandable from the perspective of seeing the former faculty role in traditional research terms and the latter as one of teaching. But the perspective begins to change when the paradigm changes to public scholarship. Certainly, it is just as challenging to get community college faculty to broaden their faculty role from merely teaching to include community engagement as it is to get four-year faculty to broaden their faculty role from teaching and research to include community involvement. However, the community college often is more aligned with its community than many four-year institutions. Of course, there are many fine examples of four-year schools vitally involved in their communities. But the trend exists.

Community colleges are not only strongly linked with their communities, but also are natural conduits for economic and civic development. Community colleges have been providing countless job-training programs, often focusing on jobs for low-income individuals. They also are natural "free spaces" for civic development (Boyte & Evans 1986).

CCA is beginning to utilize these resources in relationship to service learning, exemplified by the Family Center and the Community Self-Leadership projects; four-year institutions can continue to move in this direction. By the same token, it almost goes without saying that community-college faculty are trained in four-year institutions, and will tend to imitate the four-year faculty style. As four-year institutions begin to develop a more robust concept of public scholarship, this in the long run can have a profound effect on community-college faculty. There is reason for optimism about the possibilities of higher education transmuting service learning into an initiative that can help repair our civic infrastructure and help to reduce growing disparity between the haves and the have nots in American society.

Notes

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About the author

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His books include: *The Curricular Integration of Ethics: Theory and Practice Promoting Community Renewal Through Civic Literacy and Service Learning* (co-editor); and *Service Learning and Philosophy* (co-editor). He has published articles on ethics and education topics in more than a dozen of the leading journals in the field.

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