Service Learning and the Process of Academic Renewal

Edward Zlotkowski, Ph.D.
Senior Associate
The American Association
for Higher Education &
The Bentley Service-Learning Project

That there is, at the very least, a *perception* on the part of many that the academy is in the grips of some kind of crisis can hardly be contested. From iconoclasts like Page Smith (1990) to pillars of the establishment like Derek Bok (1982, 1990), from studies focused on faculty roles and functions (Rice 1991, 1996; Lynton 1995) to essays that lay out a vision of comprehensive reform (Wilshire 1990; Lampert 1996), it is not difficult to assemble a rich bibliography of texts that point to a need for fundamental change.

Indeed, so powerful has been this groundswell of internal criticism that many astute, seasoned observers have argued that, whether or not we choose to acknowledge it, "we may be experiencing the beginnings of [an educational] revolution no less significant than that which created the research university 100 years ago." So suggests Donald Kennedy (1995), former president of Stanford, while a continent away, Sheldon Hackney, former president of the University of Pennsylvania, has recourse to similar imagery in "calling for a great leap forward toward the radical reformation of the American university system" (1994).

"Revolution," however, is but one of the key concepts being used to characterize the current wave of critiques, ideas, and proposals sweeping across the educational landscape. Another is "paradigm," as in Thomas Kuhn's "paradigm shift" (1962), and what is implied here is nothing less than a pervasive, if also largely imperceptible, process of replacing our current model of education with a new one. Thus, Robert Barr and John Tagg (1995) talk about a necessary supplanting of the prevailing "teaching" paradigm by a new "learning" paradigm based on vastly different assumptions. Goodwin Liu, former senior program officer for higher education at the Corporation for National Service, has written of the emergence of a new epistemology or "knowledge paradigm" (1995). William Hull, provost at Samford University, has described a clash of organiza-

tional, functional, and "cultural assumptions ...root[ed] in two very different paradigms" (1995).

Revolution, paradigm shift, "the most significant transformation we will have seen in half a century — and perhaps half a millennium" (Plater 1995) — can so many knowledgeable voices all be wrong? And if they are right, even if they are only partially right, where is such change taking us? For as Ted Marchese, editor of *Change*, has noted (1995), "We have much clearer ideas about the need for change and the dysfunctions of the present system than we do what a new system might be like."

True. But our understanding of what "a new model of excellence" (Boyer 1994) might look like may be clearer - and closer at hand - than may at first be apparent. For although I do not believe there exists any single strategy capable in and of itself of bringing about academic renewal, I do believe the educational paradigm latent in what has come to be called "service learning" may represent at least one key to our moving successfully forward. Indeed, what makes service learning - "a form of experiential education, deeply rooted in cognitive and developmental psychology, pragmatic philosophy and democratic theory" (Morton and Troppe 1996) - so fascinating is that it not only provides a way of grappling successfully with many of the dysfunctions referenced in critiques of the contemporary academy but also provides a way of organizing and coordinating some of the most exciting recent developments in pedagogical practice. In other words, service learning cannot only suggest solutions, it can also suggest a new ground of coherence, provide, as it were, a template for the new organizing vision Marchese asks for.

The reason for this is simple. Almost alone among contemporary educational movements, service learning can be said to be positioned at the very point where two comprehensive sets of educational concerns intersect. On the one hand, it represents a pedagogy that *extends* our range of pedagogical resources beyond even such promising active learning strategies as cases, role playing, and simulations, and it does so by addressing directly those "problems of greatest human concern" that are "messy and confusing and incapable of technical solution" (Schon 1995). Furthermore, far from denying the value of more traditional pedagogical strategies - including the basic lecture/discussion - service-learning transforms and renews the educational enterprise as a whole by linking it to a world of praxis where induction can *complement* deduction, personal discovery *challenge* received truths, immediate experience *balance* mediated generalizations and abstract theory. In and through service learning, students learn to engage in problem-definition and problem-solving in an especially authentic, educationally powerful way.

On the other hand, service learning works with a second, intersecting axis: from knowledge as self-interest and private good it creates a bridge to knowledge as civic responsibility and "public work" (Boyte and Farr 1997). Thus, it again exhibits important qualities of flexibility and inclusion. For just as knowledge as public

work in no way denies the validity of knowledge as private good, so should knowledge as private good not exclude the former. Through service learning, students can discover the possibility and the importance of simultaneously attending to their needs as individuals *and* as members of a community. Indeed, by bringing public work into the very heart of the educational system - i.e., the curriculum - service learning helps students avoid the schizophrenia of private advancement disassociated from public standards and public need. No longer does "doing well" hold center stage while "doing good," if it exists at all, languishes somewhere off to the side.

Because it does rest at the intersection of these two primary axes — the traditional-active learning axis and the private-public axis — service learning can draw upon and help connect an unusually large number of contemporary educational concerns and practices. Problem-based learning, collaborative learning, undergraduate research, critical thinking, multiculturalism and diversity, civic awareness, leadership skills, professional and social responsibility — these are just a few items on the contemporary academic agenda that naturally ally themselves with service-learning programs.

When a writer like Sharon Parks (1986), exploring young adults' search for meaning, refers to the critical importance of "a tension between established meaning that is deeply rooted in both mind and heart - and new experience, which now stands in strong opposition over-against established meaning," she might well be describing that same disequilibrium service-learning educators see when their students first make personal contact with disadvantaged communities (Ostrow 1995). When Benjamin Barber (1989) characterizes learning as "a social activity that can take place only within a discursive community bringing together reflection and experience," he might well be pointing to the heightened sense of learning in and with community service-learning activities help to effect. When Laura Resnick (1987) warns of deep discontinuities between "learning in school and out" that tend to make contemporary education "more a consumer good than a vehicle for increasing economic productivity," she might also be laying out the logic of service learning's dialectic between theoretical paradigms and workplace/service site realities.

Indeed, it is impossible to scan even the more recent discipline-specific work on pedagogical reform without being struck by how often the agenda put forth suggests the very same concerns and strategies modelled by service-learning practice at its best. Take, for example, the Accounting Education Change Commission's monograph *Intentional Learning: A Process for Learning to Learn in the Accounting Curriculum* (1995) — a publication that nowhere explicitly mentions service learning. Here one finds a "Composite Profile of Capabilities Needed by Accounting Graduates," and in this profile such service-learning-related items as "awareness of personal and social values;" "ability to identify and solve unstructured problems in unfamiliar settings;" "ability to interact with culturally and intellectually diverse people;" and "knowledge of the activities of business, government, and nonprofit organizations, and of the

environments in which they operate." If a discipline such as accounting — a discipline not usually associated with educational risk-taking — has proposed for itself a direction so thoroughly consonant with the aims and practices of service learning, can there be any surprise that analogous compatibility can be found with the reform agendas staked out by disciplines like chemistry and composition, nursing and history?

But student- and discipline-oriented reforms are not the only concerns that service learning helps to organize and address. Of equal significance is its potential to promote far greater integration of faculty roles as well as far greater curricular coherence in general. Thus, instead of faculty dividing their time between the conflicting demands of (1) publishable research, (2) undergraduate teaching, and (3) service defined in terms of administrative activities (institutional or disciplinary), service learning facilitates linking undergraduate (and graduate) teaching *directly* to professional outreach activities, thereby providing opportunities both for what Boyer (1990) has called the scholarships of application, integration, and teaching and also for significant institutional/disciplinary service in the form of academy-sponsored community assistance. As James Votruba (1996), vice provost for outreach at Michigan State, has noted:

> Traditionally, we have treated the academic trilogy of teaching, research, and service as if they were separate and conceptually distinct forms of professional activity. In times of limited resources, it is assumed that any attempt to strengthen one part of the trilogy must be done at the expense of the others. If outreach is to become a primary and fully integrated dimension of the overall academic mission, this "zero sum" mentality must be overcome (p. 30).

Thus, the outreach agenda, including service learning, necessarily drives a more organic approach to faculty responsibilities, and the appeal of such a development is reflected not only in the increasing attention it is attracting at gatherings such as the American Association for Higher Education's Forum on Faculty Roles and Rewards but also in concrete initiatives such as Indiana Campus Compact's Faculty Fellows Program.

As for greater curricular coherence, one of the most promising, if not necessarily planned, results of service-learning programming is the increased communication it facilitates among faculty members. As many practitioners have discovered, service-learning activities tend to foster a sense of community not just with off-campus groups but also among on-campus units — faculty and student affairs staff, faculty and students, and faculty across departmental lines. This is due, in part, to the way in which service learning helps to rekindle a sense of educational idealism but also, in part, to the often-noted fact that real problems simply don't fit into neat disciplinary compart-

ments. Thus, collaboration develops quite naturally, as one aspect of a project (e.g., biology-based) gives rise to another (e.g., communication-based). Indeed, at some institutions, such as Bentley College, these natural connections have actually led to more formal arrangements whereby several courses simultaneously make use of the same service site, thereby allowing, on the one hand, students to concentrate their efforts and, on the other, faculty to work with one another without abandoning their disciplinary bases or departmental responsibilities.

I have argued elsewhere (Zlotkowski 1995, 1996) that service-learning's future in higher education is closely bound up with the willingness of practitioners and supporters to prioritize intellectual-resource development. There is now some indication that this is, in fact, beginning to happen. Particularly important in this regard is a growing body of research related to outcomes assessment — cognitive and civic/personal. For example, Alexander Austin (1996) has recently reported that preliminary findings from a study conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA on the role of service in higher education (community service as well as service learning) are "extremely encouraging": "*every one* of the thirty-four outcome measures appears to be positively affected by undergraduate participation in service learning or volunteer service" [original emphasis]. These outcomes range from critical thinking to a commitment to promoting racial understanding. Other, less-comprehensive studies have reported favorably on the comparative results of learning outcomes in two sections of the same class where one section included service learning and the other did not (Marcus et al. 1993; Boss 1994). As more quantitative studies become available to complement the vast amount of qualitative work already at hand, we can expect to find an increasing number of individual faculty members willing to experiment with this pedagogy.

This will be especially true if resource development also includes the creation of more reliable ways of documenting, evaluating, and recognizing faculty outreach — whether in the form of service learning or in the form of professional service. Ernest Lynton's leadership in this area has been especially noteworthy (Lynton and Elman 1987; Lynton 1995), as have the pioneering efforts of Portland State University to develop a comprehensive institution-specific model for including outreach in promotion and tenure guidelines. Other institutions, like the University of Utah, have made similar, if less comprehensive, moves, and it is worth noting that at a workshop on this topic offered by Portland State at the 1996 Forum on Faculty Roles and Rewards the room was filled beyond capacity.

Revision of promotion and tenure guidelines is, of course, closely related to opportunities for faculty to communicate and publish their work. Only in this way can the scholarships of application, integration, and teaching even begin to acquire the kind of legitimacy now claimed exclusively by the scholarship of discovery (Boyer 1990). Increased recognition of and support for individual faculty members working in service learning has been one of the most important

objectives of a new national faculty organization, the Invisible College, founded in 1994 and currently located at Portland State. Partially to facilitate such recognition, the Invisible College has already sponsored two "national gatherings."

It has also helped supply from its ranks many of the editors and contributors who have guided the creation of a monograph series on service learning and the individual academic disciplines. This series, first proposed by the Invisible College in December 1993, has since come under the auspices of the American Association for Higher Education which has assumed responsibility for its publication. Since each volume brings together theoretical essays, pedagogical models, and bibliographical resources specifically appropriate to the discipline in question, the series should go a long way towards dispelling the misconception that service-learning is not really an academic undertaking. By including among its volumes monographs on disciplines as diverse as biology, philosophy, and accounting, it should also help dispel, for once and for all, the misconception that whatever academic relevance service learning does have is limited to disciplines like sociology and nursing.

Developments that help paint the picture of a movement building an ever-stronger intellectual base include: the creation of new journals such as *Journal of Public Service and Outreach* and *The Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*; readers such as Barber and Battistoni's *Community Service and Education for Democracy: A Teacher/Student Sourcebook* (1993); Watters and Ford's *Writing for Change: A Community Reader* (1995); and Albert's *Service Learning Reader: Reflections and Perspectives on Service* (1994); recent studies such as Jacoby's *Service-Learning in Higher Education: Concepts and Practices* (1996) and Campus Compact's *Two Cases of Institutionalizing Service Learning: How Campus Climate Affects the Change Process* (1996); discipline-specific monographs such as *Service-Learning and Undergraduate Sociology: Syllabi and Instructional Materials* (1996) and *Writing in the Public Interest: Service-Learning and the Writing Classroom* (1995); special editions of established journals (e.g., the January 1996 issue of *The Journal of Business Ethics* and the fall 1996 issue of *Metropolitan Universities*); the inclusion of service-learning in the national and regional programming of the Speech Communication Association, the American Psychological Association, the Academy of Management, and the American Accounting Association. If such a trend continues, we should not only find service-learning well established in the academy as we currently know it but, far more importantly, also find it well positioned to help lead a renewed academy into the twenty-first century.

Notes

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About the author

Dr. Edward Zlotkowski is a professor of English at Bentley College. In 1990 he founded the Bentley Service-Learning Project, an institution-wide program

that has involved in its work all of the college's undergraduate academic departments, more than a quarter of its full-time faculty, and several thousand students. Zlotkowski has lectured and written on a wide variety of service-learning topics. He has consulted to Campus Compact and the Massachusetts Commission on Community Service as well as to many individual colleges and universities. In July 1996 he was named a senior associate at the American Association for Higher Education. In that capacity, he serves as general editor of a new monograph series exploring the relationship between service-learning and individual academic disciplines. He is also currently editing a collection of essays on service-learning programs. It will be published by Anker early in 1997 under the title *A New Model of Excellence.*