



Challenges and Rewards of Public Service and Outreach

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The challenges and rewards of public service and outreach for university faculty are vast and frequently changing. Learning to balance the demands of the institution with the requirements of the profession and the needs of the community has been invigorating. The realization of the contributions of so many who give of their time and expertise to ensure a safe, healthy, and functioning social system has been humbling. As I enter my twentieth year of service at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, it is clear that the need for faculty involvement at the local, state, and national level has never been more critical for personal, professional, and social accountability.

Outreach activities

Outreach activities in which I have been involved have ranged from community education to serving on boards of national professional associations. As past president of the Dayton Suicide Prevention Center and the Miami Valley Teen Coalition, I was able to lead non-profit community organizations to provide accessible, cost-effective, and collaborative services for people in need. As a school

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nurse I volunteered my services for almost twenty years to a district without school health resources; as a professor of nursing I have linked with agencies and schools in need of nursing services, resulting in better delivery of care to underserved populations. Working with the largest elementary school in Ohio over the years has resulted in partnerships with community agencies for a school-based health center offering affordable

comprehensive care to underserved students. Service on county and state coalitions and tasks forces relates to school and adolescent health. Active in professional organizations, I also serve on the

board of the Association of Camp Nurses and work with the local diabetes association to plan a residential camps for children with diabetes.

Service within the mission of the university

The mission statement of our university reads:

Wright State University will be a catalyst for educational excellence in the Miami Valley, meeting the need for an educated citizenry dedicated to lifelong learning and service. To those ends, as a metropolitan university, Wright State will provide: access to scholarship and learning; economic and technological development; leadership in health, education, and human services; cultural enhancement, and international understanding while fostering collegial involvement and responsibility for continuous education and research (1999).

Fortunately, the nature of nursing is care giving; consequently, my activities are professionally related and enhance my teaching and scholarship. By working with the Miami Valley Teen Coalition, a non-profit organization serving more than forty individuals and agencies providing direct services to youth, students have had opportunities to participate in community assessments, service provision, policy formation, and advocacy.

Student participation in Teen Coalition projects has resulted in increased access to services for area teens, and has provided university students with an opportunity to see faculty and other professionals work in the area of public service.

University support for public service and outreach activities

Determining university support for activities not directly related to teaching and scholarship is difficult at some universities. Specific institutional support for service activities includes time and mileage allowances for service activities, and support services (clerical, computing, meeting space, etc.). Encouragement of service activities can be found in the awarding of small grants for developing community-service components to classroom courses. Resources to promote service activities are a fairly recent addition to WSU's Center for Teaching and Learning, supported by the provost's office. A part-time staff person is available to facilitate the integration of service experiences in different courses and planning is underway for faculty-development courses on professional service. Annual recognition of outstanding service is publicly recognized by presidential awards for faculty excellence in teaching, service, and scholarship. Less clear is the value placed on service activities for promotion and tenure decisions. If the major emphasis in a

discipline is on quantity of scholarship, then the motivation to engage in public service tends to be limited.

As our university makes the transition to collective bargaining, it is uncertain what considerations will be given to service activities. The recognition of service has been inconsistent and varied across disciplines and over time. While some service resources exist, information for faculty regarding resources has not been widely disseminated.

Involvement in public service and outreach

My personal involvement in public service stems from a combination of professional interest, community commitment, and personal need. My approach to service is consistent with Paterson and Zderad's (1988) description of the nature of humanistic nursing practice as a call for help and response to need. When a need arises,

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and my skills are valued, an exchange of mutual learning, giving, receiving, and growing occurs. As a maternal-child nurse, I was actively involved in childbirth education, which furthered my professional practice, provided a much-needed service to childbearing couples, and informed my personal life during a period of childbearing and child rearing.

As an educator, one of the thrills of teaching is passing on the enthusiasm for the profession and service. Students who observe faculty engaged in service identify possible opportunities, become involved, and begin to assume many of the responsibilities previously performed by faculty. I find over time, if I've done a good job, I have worked myself out of a service opportunity and am open to the next call for help.

In the early 1980s I was a board member and served as president of the local Suicide Prevention Center. In this case, my involvement began with a personal interest and developed into a professional focus. My work with the center resulted in research, multi-disciplinary offerings about suicide issues, and the development of educational programs that are still being used in schools and community sites. As the center developed and programs became institutionalized, my professional interests refocused to encompass a more comprehensive approach to health promotion and risk reduction for school-age youth.

A project at one of the largest elementary schools in Ohio entails a school-based health center for the state. Because I believe in the importance of direct clinical supervision, I sought to develop a partnership with this nearby school, which employs one school nurse and has a diverse student population. A reciprocal relationship developed over time. The elementary school provides access to

clinical experiences for ten Wright State nursing students, meeting space and staff resources. The university provides consultation, in-service education for staff development, support for meeting project goals, and access to university resources, including grant funds. This site has been developed as a collaborative partnership with community agencies to serve as a clinical base for multiple activities. Working with school staff and the local community to determine their needs, I received funding from the Ohio Department of Health to establish one of the first school-based health centers in the state. This center was designed to increase access to health care for underserved populations and university students. Family nurse practitioner faculty provide primary care to children; collaboration with county agencies has brought to the school once unavailable services: immunizations, mental health services, asthma education, and dental-health programs. Students work with community volunteers who coordinate health-center services and classroom education, and conduct mass screenings. Last year, students developed public-service announcements to air on the local cable-access channel to increase community's awareness of health issues being discussed in the schools.

Another need for adequate clinical experiences for students resulted in a public service initiative. A summer clinical course on nursing care of children became problematic when low admissions in local hospitals limited learning opportunities for students. However, summer camps for children with special health needs enabled development of clinical experiences for forty WSU nursing students in residential camps for children with diabetes, spinal and seizure disorders, and traumatic brain injuries. The ultimate result: an annual camp experience that provides for nursing students a multi-disciplinary learning experience about diabetes, camping, professional service, non-profit organizations, and volunteerism. Staff members are assigned to care for every eight campers are: one physician, one registered nurse, two nursing students, and two counselors from a variety of disciplines. Dieticians and a psychologist also staff this camp. The camp has become a highly requested annual experience for nursing students, attracting graduate and undergraduate students who combine learning with community service. Long after they meet academic requirements, graduates of our program return to camp as registered nurses for a week. This past year more than twenty-five students enrolled in Community Service-Learning: A Camp Experience, serving as staff members at this non-profit camp.

Another motivation for involvement in public service is the need to maintain expertise in the real world. Credibility as a school nurse is essential. Educators must experience "real life" to diminish the "town and gown" rift common in many university towns. For eighteen years I volunteered time as a school nurse to a local school district, providing health screening, consultations, and teaching. During this time I identified projects for interested students to meet their needs while furthering the goals of the community. Serving as a

consultant to the Ohio Department of Health on issues related to school nursing, being a frequent speaker at statewide school nurse conferences, and being active in implementing school nurse standards in programs of school nurse education across the state have increased visibility of the university and credibility to our school nurse licensure program, resulting in increases in enrollment from four to twenty-five students per year.

Accountability should be a hallmark of teaching. As classes are filled with opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning in real situations, they are motivated to do a good job that will make a difference to others. Relevance to the real world is important to learners and provides them with opportunities critical

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for their success. A few of the recent projects by students in different courses that resulted from faculty public service involvement have included: developing and implementing a county-wide teen pregnancy prevention program in the schools planning for the annual new school nurse orientation, offered by the Ohio Department of Health under the direction of the

state school nurse consultant; conducting a program evaluation of the camp experience; assessing the programming needs of adolescent service providers; and seeking research opportunities in systems where nursing services are provided.

Summary

Good teaching can be greatly enhanced through innovation, community service, and leadership in identifying ways to link classroom teaching with the needs of the community while helping students to understand their responsibility as a university graduate, involved citizen, and professional. Faculty must serve as models not only for students but also for other faculty, creating and exhibiting ways to design learning experiences to promote active involvement of students in creating and maintaining partnerships within the community. Enthusiasm and energy are essential, but so is relevance to one's teaching and scholarly pursuits. Respect for the needs of the community should precede one's scholarly needs if long-term collaborative partnerships are to be successful. Collegiality, respect, and adherence to academic standards can result in successful endeavors that fulfill faculty responsibilities and the university's mission to provide the public with teaching, service, and scholarship.

My involvement in public service and outreach has been both professionally and personally rewarding. Professionally, I have been recognized by my peers for outstanding service contributions and have been rewarded with promotion, tenure, and merit decisions

that have included acknowledgment of service activities. Personal satisfaction for service is clearly a motivating factor for ongoing participation. Knowing that changes in health care can result from the work of committed citizens working together despite differences in geographical boundaries, institutional affiliations, and professional backgrounds provides the impetus for further community action. Wright State University students continue their involvement in community service at both the local and state level after graduation. This network of graduates who believe in and are committed to their role as responsible community members is a legacy of lasting change for which the university can be proud. ■

References

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About the Author

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