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Redlawsk, D. P., & Rice, T. (Eds.). (2009). *Civic Service: Service-Learning with State and Local Government Partners*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Review by Melvin B. Hill, Jr.

In the interest of full disclosure, I must admit at the outset that this book "had me at 'hello'" *(Jerry Maguire, 1996)*.

There are several reasons why *Civic Service: Service-Learning with State and Local Government Partners* by David P. Redlawsk, Tom Rice, and associates prompted an immediate positive response. First, it is a handsome volume, with a bright orange and purple jacket and large, bold, white lettering. Second, the title is clear and thoroughly descriptive, and includes some of my favorite words: "civic," "service," "learning," "state and local government," and "partners." And third, back in my youth I was the beneficiary of several service-learning opportunities with local governments that helped set the course for my life's work. Because of these early opportunities, I understand clearly the direct impact that positive service-learning experiences can have on one's career trajectory. I was anxious to read this book. I was not disappointed.

To ensure clarity of terminology, the authors begin by defining "service-learning" as "an educational method that combines out-of-classroom service experiences with reflective in-class instruction to enhance student learning and build stronger communities" *(p. 1)*. They acknowledge that there has been an explosion of interest in this subject over the past decade, and that much has already been written about it elsewhere. Appendix A provides examples of other service-learning projects, grouped into four major categories: service-learning with public schools, environmental projects, community planning and improvement, and policy research and legal issues. Appendix B provides a helpful list of current service-learning resources, although the authors admit that the list is not intended to be exhaustive.

Our understanding of service-learning today is broader than it used to be. These are not the service-learning projects that your father and mother had—or this author, for that matter! The academic rigor of today's service-learning projects is a new ingredient, and makes service-learning projects more appealing to faculty. Academic rigor is what distinguishes service-learning from traditional internships or experiential placements. Whereas traditional internships were valuable for both the students and the agencies served, they were generally student career-oriented, and were not

viewed as also having relevance as pedagogical tools. Today, service-learning seeks to offer students not only exposure to potential career opportunities, but also reflection and academic rigor. The growth of interest in the subject of service-learning stems at least in part from this shift in emphasis to academic enhancement. As Kay Barnes, former city manager of Kansas City, Missouri, and now Distinguished Professor of Public Leadership at Park University, says in the book's foreword, "An important component of those service-learning experiences is the integration of the hands-on activity with the academic rigor necessary to maximize the learning process" *(p. xi)*.

In this book, the authors wish to provide new information about a variety of successful service-learning programs and projects. It is a practical, "how-to" handbook, with excellent suggestions on how to put together a reflective service-learning program. It is a veritable cookbook of worthwhile service-learning projects. The authors make no apologies for its being about action and not theory. They are anxious to spread the word so that new opportunities for campus-community collaboration can be tapped. They believe in the importance and effectiveness of service-learning as a teaching tool and are unrepentant evangelists for their cause. Frankly, I think they will attract many converts.

The diversity, scope, depth, and sophistication of the projects discussed in this book are impressive. A few examples from the chapter titles themselves are illustrative:

- Linking Advanced Public Service-Learning and Community Participation with Environmental Analytical Chemistry: Lesson from Case Studies in Western New York
- Pandemic Flu Planning Support for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
- Service-Learning in an Urban Public School District: The Buffalo Experience
- Students as Policy Researchers for State Legislatures
- Service-Learning in the Engineering Sciences

The variety of authors and contributors in this book is also impressive. They include not only political science professors, whom one would expect to find in a book on this topic, but also chemistry, math, and engineering professors; a public health official; a university president; a state legislator; an elementary school science teacher; a securities analyst; and several graduate and law students.

One reason for this wide array of perspectives is an excellent section that is part of each chapter called "Voices," in which members of a service-learning partnership provide their own reflections on the value of the project. It occurred to me that in future research projects of this type one might consider the possibility of co-authorship by faculty members, students, and community members. The community members may have no previous writing experience. Nevertheless, what they have to say is important. Student participants could help introduce community members to the value of documenting their thoughts and discoveries.

In this book, the authors focus on local and state governments as partners, and there are excellent reasons for doing so. First, they are accessible. With over 80,000 local government entities across the United States, at least one of them is within arm's reach of virtually every college or university. (When de Tocqueville talked about the states being "laboratories of democracy," he never envisioned that these laboratories would swell to an additional 80,000 local government entities!) Second, local governments offer great diversity, just by virtue of being public agencies. They offer diversity in scope, content, composition, and purpose. The genius of the American political system is its multiple entry points for citizen participation. Third, everyone in a public agency is presumably there to make things better; a positive reaction to overtures for service-learning projects is virtually assured. Of course, state and federal government agencies can also make good governmental partners.

The authors provide a useful diagram that shows five principal parties to a service-learning partnership with a government agency: university faculty, students, governmental agency members, educational administrators on campus, and community constituents. Each of these parties enters into service-learning partnerships with questions and concerns. For example, many faculty members may be reluctant to incorporate service-learning projects into their teaching. They may feel, perhaps justifiably, that service-learning pedagogy is not valued on campus. It may not "count" toward their promotion or tenure, for example. Concluding his review of C. R. Hale's book *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship*, John Saltmarsh *(2010)* states that "the battle over epistemology is under way even as the institution remains locked into the tyranny of outdated and counterproductive structures and systems" *(p. 111)*.

Those committed to the outreach and engagement mission of the university are familiar with this struggle. Despite the growth and maturation of the outreach and engagement mission over the

years—from "public service" broadly conceived to Extension, outreach, engagement, and now reciprocal partnerships—many still feel that they are outside the gates, throwing pebbles at windows. The message they have been trying to convey is a relatively simple one, namely, that authentic knowledge is generated outside the academy as well as inside. They do not believe that the university should sit at one end of a catapult and periodically toss its missives of enlightenment, like sacks of potatoes, out to a waiting and grateful public. Instead, they have embraced the notion that knowledge about the community is best generated with input from, and preferably in partnership with, the community itself. After reading this excellent book, the reader may conclude that the tyranny John Saltmarsh talks about in his review is beginning to erode.

Students represent a second party of a service-learning relationship. They, too, can bring preconceived notions about what to expect from service-learning projects. Thus meetings from the outset to clarify goals and expectations by the professor and the community partner are needed. What are the community partner's needs? How can they be addressed? What has been done already? What else can be accomplished? These and other practical questions need to be addressed early on.

On the part of the community, there could be skepticism and even cynicism, if promises have been made in the past and not kept by the university. There may also be resentment of university people because of their perceived attitude. Some academic professors may conduct themselves with an air of superiority. Not all professors are good listeners *(Hill, 1999)*. They have studied their subjects, have great knowledge, and are anxious to share it. They are professors, after all, and they like to profess! This does not always go over well in service-learning settings. If one message comes through loud and clear in all of the chapters in this book, it is the necessity of listening to what the community has to say. David Maurasse *(2006)* makes this case convincingly in his book *Listening to Harlem: Gentrification, Community, and Business*.

Educational administrators, in an ideal situation, can facilitate and encourage new and innovative service-learning projects. Of course, they can also stand in the way and make these service-learning activities difficult and ineffective. As with all other members of the partnership, early communication about the parameters and expectations of a service-learning project is essential. Educational administrators do not want to be the last to know about projects that are having a direct impact on the community.

For the governmental agencies themselves, the receptivity to having "outsiders" working in close proximity to the agency officials and employees will vary. The agency may have concerns about confidentiality of its work product or the lack of expertise of the service-learners. Those most likely to embrace service-learning projects may well be the ones who have benefitted from them in the past.

In any event, the best way to address these kinds of challenges is by breaking down some of the natural and inherent biases on campus and in the community through university faculty and administrators, governmental agencies, and community constituents working on a project shoulder to shoulder. This is what the chapters in this book document. As Barbara Seals, the student whose "innocent question" prompted the Hammond Heights community project described in Chapter 8, observed about the interaction of the students and the community, "they have made a connection by working and laughing together" *(p. 186)*.

The authors make an excellent point about the initiation of service-learning projects. They argue that they can actually begin at any point on the pentagon of principal parties. They can come from the professor, the students, the administrators on campus, the government agencies, or from the community itself. The book provides examples of each. As the authors state, "with an idea and a little energy, almost anyone can be the catalyst for a service-learning project" *(p. 6)*.

What are the key "lessons learned" from this book? Here are five.

1. Receptivity and institutional support. A key prerequisite of successful service-learning programs and projects is institutional support, from higher administration, from department heads, and from the faculty generally. Faculty members will simply not want to use service-learning projects in their courses unless they are valued in the academy.

2. Inclusion. A service-learning project cannot be a top-down or even an orchestrated campus-to-community initiative. Rather, it must represent a true partnership, where the partners are valued and included from the beginning of the project. Empowering the community without paternalism from the university partner can also present a challenge. In her fascinating chapter about how much difference "a white woman and her notebook" could make in a predominately black neighborhood, even in the face of institutional inertia and prejudice, Christine Pappas shares the

concerns of one citizen in the Hammond Heights, Oklahoma, project: "I am opposed to communities being treated like third world countries and that someone has to come in and take care of them. . . . Hammond Heights needs leadership within" *(p. 181)*.

3. Communication. The overarching theme of this book, as reflected by the title, is partnerships. As Scrooge and Marley could attest, partnerships face many difficulties, even among friends. Partnerships between campus and community face special challenges. First of all, it is not just a two-way partnership, but at least a three-way collaboration. As Frederic A. Waldstein points out in Chapter 12, "Triangulated Learning" at Wartburg College, with only two people involved (the instructor and the student), there are only two lines of communication that need to function effectively—professor to student and student to professor. When a community partner is brought into the mix, four more lines of communication are added, the two between the professor and the community partner and the two between the student and the community partner. When a governmental agency is added into the mix, the number of lines of communication keeps growing. Obviously, ongoing and effective communication is essential.

4. Reciprocity. Similar to the requirement of "inclusion," there must be respect among all members in a partnership. All must embrace a holistic approach to problem solving. As stated by the authors of Chapter 14, "Reciprocity: Creating a Model for Campus-Community Partnerships," when describing the Community Neighborhood Renaissance Project between the Apalachee Ridge Estates neighborhood in Tallahassee, Florida, the City of Tallahassee, and Florida State University, "The hallmark of a successful program is that all parties work as a team, engage in a holistic approach, and are proactive in regard to the associated structured activities" *(p. 308)*.

5. Sustainability. Successful service-learning projects are not one-shot propositions. They are not short-lived. Rather, they should be intended for the long term. It is not about doing a good deed for the day, and then moving on to another good deed. Rather, it is about long-term sustainability, so that the community and the campus can feel that they are engaged in a reciprocal relationship in which each party benefits from the collaboration over time. Sustaining service-learning projects is thus not for the faint of heart. Such projects require long-term institutional and programmatic commitment. Perhaps Samuel Johnson's *(1791)* advice to Sir Joshua Reynolds applies here: "A man, Sir, should keep his friendships in constant repair."

One additional important conclusion drawn from reading this book: Service-learning projects of this kind can benefit all students. As the authors of Chapter 2 note,

> one myth that was dispelled was that only the best students should take advantage of these opportunities . . . . Another valuable lesson was that the best students do not always make the best team leaders, and the most diligent team workers are not necessarily the hardest-working students. . . . Often group leadership and highly productive and dedicated work emerges from academically less-than-stellar students. *(p. 34)*

Let's let an engineer wrap this up. The author of Chapter 13, "Service-Learning in the Engineering Sciences," William Oates, says,

> A final piece of advice to those who are new to the field is to start small and build successes. Start with a partner and project that you feel good about, and do not worry if it has all the attributes of a perfect service-learning project. We and others in the field have found that getting started provides experiences to equip us to advance and improve each time we teach. We, like the students, continue to learn and grow. Done right, it has the potential to be one of the most rewarding and exciting experiences of your career. *(pp. 301–302)*

Service-learning actually has the potential to do even more. As Kay Barnes says in the foreword, "Service-Learning with state and local government partners can have a crucial impact on the country's future" *(p. xii)*. The book's editing authors Redlawsk and Rice add this: "The bottom line is that service-learning offers hope for reversing the troubling downward trend in civic engagement" *(p. 3)*.

In closing, let me say that I choose to align myself with these evangelists for service-learning. And like other evangelists, I have difficulty seeing the beam in my own eye, so I will leave criticism of this volume to others. For me, it was captivating and even inspirational. Well done, team!

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About the Reviewer

Melvin B. Hill, Jr. is a former faculty member and administrator at the University of Georgia. He served as the Stephens Fellow in Law and Government in the Institute of Higher Education (1996-2009), and prior to that was director at Carl Vinson Institute of Government (1983-1996). He served as editor of the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* from 2000 to 2009. His administrative and teaching interests centered on working with state and local government officials and citizens generally to promote improved understanding, policy-making, and administration of government in a democratic society. Hill earned his bachelor's degree in Economics from Bucknell University, and his M.P.A./J.D. degrees from Cornell University.

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