



Annual Report of the Service Learning Advisory Committee to Academic Senate 2010-2011

Committee members: Bill Loker, Dean of Undergraduate Education (chair); Sara Rumiano, Director of Procurement & Contract Services; Mike Thorpe, Risk Manager; Lynne Bercaw (EDUC), faculty representative; Mary Flynn, Program Administrator of Community Action Volunteers in Education (CAVE); Michael Briand, Director of Civic Engagement; Ken Steidley, community representative.

Goals

During the 2010-11 academic year, the Service Learning Advisory Committee has pursued three main goals:

1. to begin the transition, in conceptualization and in practice, from the relatively familiar idea of service learning to an expanded notion of community or civic engagement that includes but goes beyond service learning;
2. to examine critically information that has been routinely gathered and reported concerning service learning at CSU, Chico, and to establish more-rigorous procedures for collecting and reporting SL data;
3. to design, organize, and conduct two “workshops” for faculty wishing to learn about civic engagement and how to incorporate service and civic learning activity into the courses they teach, especially General Education courses that will be proposed for the 10 new GE Pathways.

1. The Service Learning Advisory Committee (SLAC) was created six years ago by Executive Memorandum 05-18 for the purpose of developing procedures for managing institutional risk in service learning. Risk management is an ongoing need, and we will continue to address issues of this nature. Since the EM was issued, though, the Service Learning Advisory Committee has made substantial progress toward the goal of effective risk management. The Committee believes it is now possible and desirable to give at least equal emphasis to promoting and improving high-quality service- and civic-learning experiences for students.

In view of the prominence of civic engagement in the mission of the CSU and of this University, and in view of the contribution civic engagement can make to achieving several of the Student Learning Outcomes established for the new General Education Pathways, the Committee believes the University needs a body, on which faculty are well represented, to act in an advisory capacity with regard to all aspects of civic engagement, not just risk management issues. In particular, the Committee needs to be able to assist the Dean of Undergraduate

Education, the Director of Civic Engagement, and the Program Administrator of CAVE in expanding and improving all aspects of civic engagement.

Accordingly, late in the Fall semester 2010, the Committee requested that Academic Senate approve a proposal to amend Executive Memorandum 05-18 for the purpose of charging the Committee with not only developing and monitoring additional procedures to strengthen and improve risk management, but also with increasing the programmatic efficiency and effectiveness of service learning, and with enhancing the quality of the educational experience students receive when they are placed with public or community-based organizations or agencies. Specifically, the Service Learning Advisory Committee proposed four principal changes to EM 05-18:

- Supplementing the emphasis on risk management with an equal emphasis on improving service learning.
- Defining “service learning” as a form of “civic engagement,” and defining “civic learning” as a form of “service learning.”
- Replacing a lengthy enumeration of faculty responsibilities regarding service learning with a more-flexible authorization of the Service Learning Advisory Committee to establish procedures for carrying out the purpose of the EM.
- Increasing the size and diversity of the Service Learning Advisory Committee.

After discussion in both the Educational Policies and Programs Committee and subsequently in full Senate, the proposal passed Senate as an action item on February 24th, 2011, and is now awaiting President Zingg’s signature.

2. In 2010, the CSU Board of Trustees released Audit Report 09-54, *Off-Campus Activities Systemwide*. With respect to Community Engagement, the Committee on Audit noted that

Service learning activity is subject to campus and system-wide reporting for various purposes, including recognition through The Carnegie Foundation of the Advancement of Teaching that annually selects colleges and universities for community engagement classification awards. [Moreover,] GC §13402 and §13403 require a system or systems of internal accounting and administrative controls so that reasonable assurances can be given that measures to safeguard assets, check the accuracy and reliability of accounting data, promote operational efficiency, and encourage adherence to prescribed managerial policies are being followed.

Upon completing its investigation, the Committee on Audit concluded that

processes for accumulating and validating service learning statistical estimates were inefficient and potentially error-prone because of estimates that could not be verified. A patchwork of different systems were utilized on the campuses to estimate data on the extent of service learning such as the number of course sections, the number of students involved, and the number of hours contributed to the community. ...System-wide, various resources have been utilized for collecting and reporting service learning statistics... (p. 18) The systems at the campuses and system-wide level have produced estimates or projections of service learning activity, but not accurate numbers with adequate verifiable supporting documentation...

Inefficient systems and unreliable statistics on service learning activity create misleading information on program accomplishments and jeopardize CSU credibility. (p. 19)

Accordingly, the Committee on Audit recommended that

the chancellor's office work with the campuses to improve the way in which service learning statistics are generated and documented. (p. 19)

The Chancellor's Office agreed and committed the CSU Office of Community Engagement to working with campuses to improve data collection in three areas: possible implementation of CSU, Monterey Bay's PeopleSoft module, *My Service Learning Placement* (MYSLP) with a majority of campuses; strengthening the Academic Planning Database data-collection process on individual campuses; and securing an annual or biannual system-wide survey of students' community engagement efforts

In order to begin the effort to improve data collection and reporting at CSU, Chico, the Office of Civic Engagement reached agreement with Community Action Volunteers in Education (CAVE) to make the latter responsible for (*inter alia*) collecting data required by the Chancellor's Office, in return for passing through to CAVE the annual "California Call to Service" funding (\$45,000 in 2010-2011) provided by the Chancellor's Office. Specifically, CAVE will

- Construct, develop, and utilize a system for collecting, electronically recording, and processing as needed all data pertaining to civic engagement/ service learning programs at California State University, Chico;

- Regularly analyze and report to the Director of Civic Engagement all information derived from data collected with respect to the University's civic engagement/service learning programs;

- Assist the Director of Civic Engagement, the Service Learning Advisory Committee, and AS assessment staff in constructing, developing, and utilizing a system for evaluating (a) the (academic, attitudinal, and other) effects on students of participating in civic engagement/ service learning courses administered by CAVE, and (b) the effects on community partners, the people they serve, and the community as a whole of students participating in civic engagement/service learning courses administered by CAVE;

- At the conclusion of the spring semester each year, conduct an annual self-assessment of CAVE's role in supporting service learning programs at California State University, Chico;

- Conduct a "benchmarking" exercise for the purpose of identifying "best practices" in service learning administration; and

- Establish clear and appropriate criteria for evaluating s CAVE's role in supporting civic engagement programs and evaluate its efforts in light of those criteria.

As part of the effort to obtain accurate information concerning service learning at CSU, Chico, the Director of Civic Engagement interviewed faculty who teach 26 courses that CAVE has listed as service learning courses and for which CAVE has conducted background checks for students seeking to be placed in community settings or with community organizations as part of their course requirements.

Drawing on the definitions of service learning employed by the CSU and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching,¹ the Director of Civic Engagement derived the following criteria for determining whether a course contains a requirement for genuine “service learning” (as opposed to “service” or “community service”).

1. SL teaches both academic and civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes and relates them to each other.
2. SL links course content with meaningful, hands-on experience in community service (i.e., with work that benefits and strengthens the community).
3. SL includes structured reflection on the experience in light of course content, so that each reinforces the other.

Applying these criteria to information provided by faculty teaching the 26 courses, the Director concluded that perhaps 2 of the 26 qualify as genuine service learning courses; roughly 6 could be interpreted by some persons as, or could with minor modifications be made into, service learning courses; and 18 clearly do not qualify as service learning courses. In contrast, if the weaker standard of “experiential learning that produced some public benefit” is used, then most of the 26 courses would qualify. It is the opinion of the Director of Civic Engagement, however, that accepting the weaker standard in place of the CSU and Carnegie-derived criteria undermines the goal of expanding and improving service learning at Chico State, and also runs contrary to the emphasis placed by the CSU Trustees Committee on Audit for achieving greater validity and reliability in data collection and reporting. The Committee will consider this matter in the near future.

3. Our third goal is being realized through two faculty “workshops” on civic learning. The first, held in March 2011, was oriented to faculty in the STEM disciplines (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). The second is our annual Civic Learning Institute (piloted initially in May 2010), which will be held May 25th and 26th. The Institute will consist of a seminar/workshop followed by a year-long “learning community” for a new cohort of Chico State instructors.

A central aim of the Institute is to assist faculty in their efforts to infuse civic learning into the new General Education program. This aim grows out of our conviction that today's university must dispel incoming students’ misapprehension that a college education is chiefly the process of training for a career. An emphasis on civic learning is needed to help students appreciate that they are destined to become members of a self-governing society who ought to prepare with equal determination for their “civic careers”—as citizens who act as analysts, planners, priority-setters, decision-makers, administrators, and executors of their communities’ and nation’s collective wills.

¹ “The CSU defines Service Learning as ‘academic study linked to community service through community service through structured reflection so that each reinforces the other.’ Courses with a Service Learning (SL) component are designed to teach critical thinking and problem-solving as they relate to the real world and the shaping of social policy. SL courses use hands-on experiences in the community to facilitate mastery of the subject matter and a sense of civic responsibility.”

The Carnegie definition is similar: “Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities.”

Making room for civic learning in GE courses has to begin, obviously, with faculty. The upcoming Institute will help the 2011 faculty cohort move from a conceptual and contextual understanding of civic learning to the creation of strategies and techniques for use in courses they currently teach or may teach in the future.² The three-day event will begin with an address by George Mehaffy from the Association of American Colleges & Universities.

Resource Development

In December 2010, the University received word that it had been awarded a two-year, \$250,000 grant from the W.M. Keck Foundation for the purpose of extending civic learning strategies to courses beyond the first year (where they are known collectively as “Public Sphere Pedagogy” and are embodied in events such as the Town Hall Meeting and the Great Debate). The grant will support faculty Civic Learning Institutes in 2011 and 2012, and will enable the Office of Civic Engagement to launch a new “Neighborhood Connections Project” designed to create more opportunities for faculty and students to enhance their academic knowledge and skills by studying “real-world” issues, problems, and needs *in situ*. The funding effectively will double the work capacity of the Office of Civic Engagement for the next two years

Conclusion

As we noted in our application to the Keck Foundation, although American universities were created to serve the purposes of a democratic society, today they aren’t doing enough to equip students for life as effective decision-makers, leaders, and actors in the public world of their communities and society. Many educators now agree that both the quantity and quality of citizen involvement in public affairs has fallen to levels that pose a threat to the viability of democracy in our country. Derek Bok summed up the problem when he quipped, “communities have problems; universities have departments.”

As Alexander Astin of UCLA has observed, If higher education doesn’t start giving citizenship and democracy much greater priority, who will? The Service Learning Advisory Committee accepts the charge implicit in Astin’s question as a responsibility of higher education, and is working to carry it out at Chico State.

Submitted April 1, 2011 by Lynne Bercaw, Ph.D., Member of the Service Learning Advisory Committee and representative of Academic Senate

Information provided by Michael K. Briand, Ph.D., Director of Civic Engagement

² The CLI will address questions such as: What is civic learning? What can making a place for it in your courses do for faculty teaching research? How can civic learning help new GE Pathway courses generate Student Learning Outcomes, especially the personal and social responsibility SLO? How can civic learning be incorporated smoothly and seamlessly into courses? How does one manage a civic learning experience and assess student performance? How does one put together a syllabus that takes civic learning from principles to practice? How can faculty obtain support from the Office of Civic Engagement, and from colleagues who know about experiential learning?