



## Annual Report of the Service Learning Advisory Committee to Academic Senate 2011-2012

Committee members: William Loker, Dean of Undergraduate Education (chair); Sara Rumiano, Director of Procurement & Contract Services; Michael Thorpe, Risk Manager; Holly Nevarez (HCSV), Senate-appointed faculty representative; Carla Shields, Program Manager of Community Action Volunteers in Education (CAVE); Jim Pushnik (BIOL), faculty representative; Zach Justus (CMST), faculty representative; Katie Combs, Associated Students representative; Alexa Benson-Valavanis, community representative; Heather Keag, community representative; Michael Lo, community representative; Michael Briand, Director of Civic Engagement.

Good afternoon. I'm Michael Briand. I'm the Office of Civic Engagement.

On this occasion the past couple of years, I've spared you an oral dissertation on the state of service learning, and civic engagement more generally. Today, though, with your indulgence I'd like to take a few minutes to draw your attention to some important points in the Committee's written report.

First, the good news: For the sixth time in seven years, Chico State has been designated a member of the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. The Honor Roll recognizes institutions of higher education for their commitment to and achievement in community service.

For almost 50 years, our campus has been a national leader in college students giving back to and participating in the life of the communities the University serves. Community service is a fundamental element of Chico State's identity, and the commitment to service figures prominently in our statements of purpose and in our self-characterizations.

A recent national survey of incoming students found that more than 69 percent expressed a "strong interest" in courses that afford "hands-on" community involvement. This is especially true of students from traditionally under-represented groups. It's important that we build upon and even strengthen the desire of students to include community-based experience as part of their academic studies. This kind of experience contributes substantially to preparing young adults for both their careers and their future community roles. Not surprisingly, research

shows that students who participate in service and civic activities are more likely than other students to stay in college, perform well, and graduate on time.

## **Current Goals**

In support of the Service Learning Advisory Committee's responsibilities, during the past academic year the Office of Civic Engagement has pursued three main goals:

First, by improving faculty, student, and community access to information, facilitate growth in

- (1) the number of having a service or civic learning component, especially GE courses;
- (2) the number of students participating in service or civic learning activities, and
- (3) the number of community partners benefiting from the service or civic learning activity engaged in by our students;

Our second goal has been to offer faculty continually-improving professional development opportunities designed to assist them in incorporating service or civic learning activities into the courses they teach.

And third, generate greater community awareness of and interest in course-related service and civic activities by proactively reaching out to potential community partners.

## **Discussion**

WITH REGARD TO GOAL 1: The University is poised to make a "giant leap" forward in our ability to collect and utilize data to improve our civic engagement efforts.

Thanks very largely to Associated Students, by early in the Fall semester, we expect to have in place a data management software system<sup>1</sup> with cutting-edge capacity to connect and facilitate interaction among community partners, faculty, and students.

The system will enable users from both campus and community to search for information about potential partners and to make contact with them directly.

Community groups will be able to identify faculty and students who have knowledge, experience, or skills they can bring to bear on those groups' needs. Faculty and students having

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<sup>1</sup> CoMesh was developed by IQR Consulting, Inc. It has been tested by San Francisco State University, the University of San Francisco, and the University of California at San Francisco, and will be installed at Sonoma State this summer. An alternative, called "S4," was developed at CSU, Monterey Bay and has been offered to CSU campuses. A careful analysis by Bronwen Grady of Information Technology Support Services and Matt Norby of Associated Students concluded that the CoMesh software would serve Chico State better, particularly because it is capable of being customized to incorporate CAVE's clearance process for students performing service.

such resources will be able to identify community groups that would benefit from bringing them to bear on group needs.

In short, the database will act a bit like Match.com or eHarmony.com, enabling community and campus to “find partners,” or at least “dates.”

The potential benefit of the new data management system for the University’s ability to serve the communities of the North State is hard to overstate. In principle, we’ll be able to connect the campus with every community group in the eleven counties of our service area. Of course, whether we can respond effectively to the growing needs that North State communities face today, in the fiscal circumstances that prevail at present, remains to be seen.

WITH REGARD TO GOAL 2: As an emerging field of research and practice, civic engagement continues to grow in terms of both the quantity and the quality of the ideas, information, and innovations that are being generated. In order to maximize the number of Chico State faculty incorporating service or civic learning activities into the courses they teach (again, especially those in General Education), the Office of Civic Engagement provides professional development opportunities in the form of our annual Civic Learning Institute and Civic Faculty Learning Community, and this fall, through a civic learning “track” at the annual CELT conference.

With the advent of the University’s new GE program—which emphasizes, among other student learning outcomes, the importance of students cultivating a sense of personal and social responsibility for the world beyond the campus—it’s important to afford faculty access to the knowledge, skills, and tools they need to design and implement learning experiences that meet the aims and expectations associated with our new GE program. On May 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, we’ll hold our fourth annual Civic Learning Institute, to be followed in the fall with our second academic-year Faculty Learning Community. (*Faculty aspiring to join the 1 percent*—please note that attending the Institute earns participants a stipend of \$250.)

WITH REGARD TO GOAL 3: Last October, we began the outreach phase of our Keck Foundation-funded “Neighborhood Connections Project.” With assistance from Tim Truby, Community Services Officer in the Chico Police Department, and student mentors from the First-year Experience program, we sent more than 70 students (most of them first-year students from UNIV 101) into 10 Chico neighborhoods to administer a brief survey. The main purpose of the survey was to find out whether residents would be interested in having students help them improve their neighborhoods by tapping into the resources that already exist in those neighborhoods.

In response to the favorable response we received, in February we formed “The ‘Hood Group” (which we modeled shamelessly on the Communications Studies Department’s

“Tehama Group”). This semester we have 10 students working as “civic consultants” to help residents build their capacity to communicate and collaborate for mutual benefit. To date we’ve established relationships with 3 Chico neighborhoods, and look forward to working with several more in the coming academic year.

Parenthetically, I’d like to note that, in keeping with the dictum that “no good deed goes unpunished, Officer Truby recently was reassigned from his decade-long community-building work to patrol car duty.

## Challenges

As in the past, in the coming year we expect to face three primary challenges as we carry out the work of the Service Learning Advisory Committee through the Office of Civic Engagement:

WITH REGARD TO Data Collection: As we install the new on-line data management system, we look forward to offering faculty, students, staff, and community members quick and easy access to accurate, comprehensive information that will greatly facilitate the exploration of possible opportunities for collaboration between the campus and the community while advancing the civic development of Chico State students. We also look forward—and I can’t tell you how much hair I’ll be saving by doing so—to submitting accurate reports to the Chancellor’s Office and other entities requiring or requesting documented evidence of the extent and nature of the University’s civic engagement efforts. The challenge lies in actually gathering the large quantity of data needed for the database; ensuring it’s comprehensive and accurate; keeping it up to date; and of course persuading people to use it.

WITH REGARD TO recruitment of faculty to the cause of service and civic learning: Both faculty who already provide their students with contextual learning experiences and those who haven’t yet done so bring different perspectives and levels of professional experience to the ideas of civic engagement and service and civic learning. Appealing to this broad range of views requires that we “create a big tent” that everyone will feel comfortable entering in order to learn, while at the same time not watering down these ideas so much that we undermine our effort to expand faculty members’ sense of possibilities and to familiarize them with the best thinking in the field.

The biggest challenge, though, is assuring faculty on a number of points:

First: Incorporating civic engagement into courses *doesn't require* starting out with complicated community-based service or civic learning activities or arrangements. It's possible, and often desirable, to begin with less-ambitious, in-classroom activities.

Second: Community-based service and civic learning activities don't *have* to increase the amount of work faculty have to do in teaching their courses. In fact, these activities can often make preparation and administration easier, especially if instructors ask the Office of Civic Engagement and CAVE for help. There are many, many ways to provide students with content-related service or civic experience—some of which faculty might not have imagined possible.

Third: Community-based service and civic learning activities aren't necessarily appropriate for *all* courses, or even *most*. But they often *are* suitable

(1) for many GE courses;

(2) for any Pathway course having personal and social responsibility as a stated SLO;

(3) for any course intended to prepare students to enter a career in which there are, at least nominally, standards or codes of professional responsibility or ethics—or should be; and

(4) for any discipline-related co-curricular organization such as a student club or association.

FINALLY, WITH REGARD TO Resources: In recent years, we've been fortunate to receive from the Chancellor's Office an allocation of \$45,000, which is made to all campuses in the system. In keeping with our previous practice, however, and in order to support the essential work of CAVE, the full allocation is passed through to CAVE. As a result, the Director of Civic Engagement remains a half-time position. In 2011, the grant we received from the Keck Foundation made it possible to add another .4 FTE in order to establish our Neighborhood Connections project. In the absence of replacement funding, when the Keck grant expires at the end of 2012 the position will return to half-time.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> According to the instructions accompanying the Chancellor's 2011-2012 "Call to Service" application, "Up to \$45,000 is available to each campus to support the campus service-learning or community engagement office. Funds can be used to aid in building and advancing infrastructure so that each campus develops *at a minimum an office that has a full-time equivalent director, a community partner liaison, administrative support and office space and equipment.* Additionally, funds can be used to pay for implementation aspects of the office's strategic plan. If the service-learning or community engagement director position is not currently filled, the campus is not eligible to receive funding at the present time." [emphasis added]

In conclusion, I'd like to call your attention to the recent report of the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, titled *A Crucible Moment: College Learning & Democracy's Future*.<sup>3</sup> The paper attempts to create a sense of urgency with respect to preparing students with the knowledge, skills, and experience they will need to govern their communities and society in the years ahead. I'd like to conclude with an excerpt from the report:

Anne Colby and her colleagues ... define democracy as “fundamentally a practice of shared responsibility for a common future.” Moreover, as Diane Ravitch observes, “a society that is racially and ethnically diverse requires, more than other societies, a conscious effort to build shared values and ideals among its citizenry.”

...Community service is not necessarily the same as democratic engagement with others across differences [in order] to collectively solve public problems. Nor does *service* always establish a reciprocal partnership or lead to an analysis of systemic causes of a given issue.

...By teaching students to address real-world issues in concert with others, ...colleges and universities...are helping students move from civic knowledge to civic action, thus better preparing them to serve their communities and the nation as informed, active citizens when they graduate.

Distinguished civic scholar and [higher education] leader Tom Ehrlich describes this civic reform movement as follows:

“Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, *through both political and nonpolitical processes.*”

...While the civic reform movement in higher education has affected almost all campuses, its influence is partial rather than pervasive. Civic learning and democratic engagement remain optional rather than expected for almost all students.

...Higher education in a robust, diverse, and democratic country needs to cultivate in each of its graduates...*the commitment to act collectively in public to achieve shared purposes.* ...The first step for all concerned is to recognize the erosion of the national investment in civic learning and democratic engagement—and the dire consequences of that disinvestment.

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<sup>3</sup> 2012. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

The second step is to mobilize the will and the commitment to reverse the downward spiral.

Thank you. I'll try to answer any questions you might have.