



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 for 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.

Introduction and Update

1. In February 2011, Academic Senate approved a proposal by the Service Learning Advisory Committee (SLAC) to amend Executive Memorandum 05-018 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. In April last year, President Zingg approved the proposal by signing into effect EM 11-046.

2. 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.

Each year, roughly 3,000 Chico State students contribute more than 75,000 volunteer hours, many of those hours through programs administered by CAVE or embedded in more than 30 academic service-learning courses. 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 the University's identity, and the commitment to service figures prominently in the mission statements of the University as a whole and of academic affairs in particular.

In line with national trends, a growing number of students come to Chico State because of its emphasis on community engagement. A recent 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 is important that we build upon and even strengthen the desire of students to include community-based experience as part of their academic studies. Such 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.

Most of us are familiar with the success of CAVE programs such as Chico Ambassadors, and of events such as Up 'til Dawn event, which raises funds for St. Jude Children's Hospital, and "Blitz Build," the annual winter service project sponsored by the College of Engineering, Computer Science, and Construction Management, which brings students together with community partners to construct low-cost housing. Less familiar, but at least equally important, are the often-unheralded—and sometimes undetected—efforts of individual faculty to incorporate service or civic learning activities into the courses they teach.

Current Goals

In support of the Service Learning Advisory Committee's responsibilities, during the 2011-2012 academic year the Office of Civic Engagement has pursued three main goals:

1. to improve access by faculty, students, and potential community partners to information that will facilitate (a) growth in the number of courses having a service or civic learning component, (b) the number of students participating in service or civic learning activities, and (c) the number of community partners benefitting from the service or civic learning activity engaged in by our students;
2. to increase the number of faculty incorporating service or civic learning activities into the courses they teach by providing them with meaningful professional development opportunities; and
3. to generate greater awareness of and interest in course-related service and civic activities on the part of the community by proactively reaching out to potential community partners.

Discussion

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. By early in the Fall semester, we expect to have in place a data management software system¹ with cutting-edge capacity to connect and facilitate interaction among community partners, faculty, and students. The

¹ CoMesh was developed by IRQ 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.

system, called CoMesh, will enable users from both campus and community to search for information about and to make contact with potential partners. Community groups will be able to use the highly-searchable database to identify faculty and students who have knowledge, experience, or skills they can bring to bear on those groups' needs. Faculty and students having 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 will be able in time 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.

GOAL 2:

As a field of research and practice, civic (community) engagement continues to grow in terms of both the quantity and the quality of the ideas, information, and innovations that are continuously being generated. In order to maximize the number of Chico State faculty incorporating service or civic learning activities into the courses they teach (especially those in General Education), the Office of Civic Engagement strives to provide them with professional development opportunities in the form of our annual Civic Learning Institute and Civic Faculty Learning Community.

With the advent of the University's new General Education 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 is essential to give faculty the knowledge, skills, and tools to design and implement learning experiences that meet the aims and expectations associated with our new GE program.

To this end, in May we will once again offer faculty a Civic Learning Institute and a Civic Faculty Learning Community. In 2011, the number of Institute participants grew from 7 the previous year to 21 last year. Our first Civic Faculty Learning Community, now nearing its conclusion, will "graduate" 5 faculty who will be teaching courses in 2012-13 that have well-developed academic *and* service/civic SLOs, supported by well-designed activities to advance those SLOs.

In order to provide faculty with improved support year-round, the Office of Civic Engagement has re-designed and upgraded the content and functionality of its website. The OCE has also adopted a policy of consulting with faculty on a one-to-one basis in response to ad hoc requests for assistance in designing or implementing community-based learning experiences linked to course content.

GOAL 3:

In October, we began the outreach phase of Keck Foundation-funded “Neighborhood Connections Project.” With guidance from Tim Truby, the Crime Prevention Office of the Chico Police Department, we sent more than 70 students (most of them from UNIV 101, the University’s introduction to college life for first-year students) into 10 Chico neighborhoods to administer a brief survey. The chief aim of the survey was to ascertain the extent of residents’ openness to having students assist them in building their neighborhoods’ capacity for self-reliance.

In response to the generally favorable reaction by the community residents surveyed, in February we formed “The ‘Hood Group,” a collection of students who commit to serving as “civic consultants” who help communities build stronger and better neighborhoods by enhancing the ability of residents to form sustained relationships characterized by effective communication, shared responsibility, mutual trust and respect, and a readiness to collaborate. With training provided by experienced individuals, consultants provide support ranging from facilitating communication, running meetings, providing technical assistance, and planning projects to recruiting and “hiring” other students to help meet residents’ civic needs. In bringing to actual community tasks the knowledge and “know-how” they’ve acquired from their studies, consultants develop and apply skills that will serve them well in their careers and community life after college. The Office of Civic Engagement arranges independent study credit for consultants, but also aims to create opportunities for faculty to offer students in their courses community-based learning experiences linked to course content.

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 and its operational arm, the Office of Civic Engagement:

1. Data Collection

With adoption of 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 (1) facilitate the exploration of possible opportunities for collaboration that will benefit the public while fostering the civic development of Chico State students, and (2) enable the Office of Education to submit accurate reports to the CSU 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 gathering the large quantity of data needed for the database, ensuring it is comprehensive and accurate, and keeping it up to date.

2. Recruitment of Faculty

Both faculty who already provide their students with contextual learning experiences and those who have not yet done so bring a variety of perspectives to the ideas of civic engagement and service and civic learning. Appealing to this broad range of viewpoints 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 familiarize them with the best thinking in the field.

3. Improving the Quality of the Student Learning Experience

The field of service/civic learning has seen rapid growth in both the quantity and quality of the scholarly literature, in connection with both theoretical development and empirical research. Yet despite an service and civic learning activities from colleges and universities around the country, there continues to be a dearth of examples of courses in which well-conceived and clearly articulated student learning outcomes (both academic and civic) are achieved through student participation in the activities designed to produce those outcomes. The lack of examples that readily speak to the individual faculty member’s course-related instructional needs creates a substantial research burden that could be lessened greatly if existing databases (such as Campus Compact’s) were electronically searchable. Since there is little chance of this occurring in the near future, locating examples of service and civic learning courses that meet faculty needs remains inordinately time- and energy-consuming.

4. Resources

In the prevailing economic and fiscal climates, operating with insufficient resources is a fact of life with which everyone struggles to cope. In recent years, we have been fortunate to receive from the CSU 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 has been passed through to CAVE. As a result, the Director of Civic Engagement remains a .5 FTE position. In 2011-2012, a grant from the W.M. Keck Foundation has supported an additional .4 FTE. In the absence of replacement funding, when the Keck grant expires at the end of 2012 the position will return to .5 FTE.²

Conclusion

Just a couple of months ago, the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement published a white paper titled *A Crucible Moment: College Learning &*

² 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]

*Democracy's Future.*³ 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. We conclude this report with an excerpt from *A Crucible Moment*:

Today's education for democracy needs to be informed by deep engagement with the values of liberty, equality, individual worth, open-mindedness, and the willingness to collaborate with people of differing views and backgrounds toward common solutions for the public good. Anne Colby and her colleagues capture the complexity of civic learning and democratic engagement when they define democracy as "fundamentally a practice of shared responsibility for a common future. It is the always unfinished task of making social choices and working toward public goals that shapes our lives and the lives of others" (Colby et al. 2007, 25). Moreover, as historian 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" (Ravitch 2000, 466).

...Community service is not necessarily the same as democratic engagement with others across differences 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. But service can be, and often is, the first step toward a more fully developed set of civic capacities and commitments—not the least of which is working with others to co-create more vibrant communities to address significant national needs and to promote economic and social stability.

... The challenge for colleges and universities in the next decade is to make such opportunities pervasive, rather than random, across the institution. Hundreds of trailblazing colleges and universities have been building innovative forms of civic learning for students and establishing transformative partnerships with the wider community at home and abroad. ...By teaching students to address real-world issues in concert with others, some colleges 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 leader Tom Ehrlich describes this civic reform movement: "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" (Ehrlich 2000, vi).

...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 an open and curious mind, critical acumen, public voice, ethical and moral judgment, and the commitment to act collectively in public to achieve shared purposes. ...[C]ivic inquiry and collaborative problem-solving need to be included in students' major programs, including programs that prepare graduates for immediate entry into careers.

...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.

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

* * *

³ 2012. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Submitted April 6, 2012 by Holly Nevarez, designated representative of Academic Senate, on behalf of the Service Learning Advisory Committee.

Information provided by Michael Briand, Director of Civic Engagement