

FORECASTING THE FUTURE OF SERVICE-LEARNING

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HOW DO YOU forecast the future of service-learning? Declining enrollments and funds for student affairs and student services are not the only changes on the horizon for student volunteerism.

Recently the *Chronicle of Higher Education* documented the long-prophesied declining enrollment; other predictions include "lifelong learning" and support for a hard line, traditional approach to education—a "no frills, back to the basics" attitude. Just as service-learning administrators have begun to resolve their own indecision about giving students academic credit for volunteering in the community, there is talk of doing away with the "experimentation" of the socially oriented 1960's.

The Federal government is reinforcing the relationship between work and education by redefining "work" to include all types of traditional volunteer tasks. Money and national educational policy are being brought into the deliberations. A number of proponents are assembling their forces for a national public service program. This involvement of additional paid volunteers will certainly confuse our present definition of "service-learning."

Having predicted a situation of dynamic uncertainty, let me introduce a paradox: there will be a bright future for service-learning on the college scene. Look around you at the budgets, the size of the staffs, and the enormous number of administrative units that are staffing student volunteer programs. It is apparent that service-learning in higher education is here to stay. The coming

years will see service-learning (or another form of it) align itself with the major functions of colleges—teaching and learning. The manager of a student volunteer unit on a college campus must recognize the long-range goals of the institution and creatively develop service-learning to offer services consistent with those goals.

Futurologists' Predictions

Futurologists suggest that forecasting the future involves two steps: (1) identifying the fundamental contribution that an organization or program makes to essential social functions, and (2) projecting the possible (or impossible) changes that current long-term trends will have upon that contribution.

What, then, are the "essential social functions" provided by institutions of higher education? "Functions" are services that every society requires. The university is a source of several services fundamental to social stability. Some of these are: education and socialization of youth, problem-solving, and research. The most important contribution that service-learning can make is in the area of education and socialization of youth. It has a much weaker role in the area of research.

Alvin Toffler's *The Futurists* (New York: Random House, 1972) suggests three broad trends that will continue into the next century: rapid technological change, dispersion of services, particularly education, to all groups throughout society, and an increasing sense of national community caused by diminishing time and distance factors.

Rapid technological change—Of these three keys to the future, rapid technological change is probably the most widely recognized. The impact of 25 years of television, the development of solid state electronics in the last five years, and the sudden recent developments in lesser technology all demonstrate this trend. These innovations have produced total changes in our lifestyles, our personal possessions, and our ability to communicate with each other.

During the next decade, the extension of these technological changes seems almost limitless. Americans tend to adopt rapidly each new consumer device as it becomes available. Home computers and two-way videophones are imminent. The sudden widespread adoption of the Citizens Band (CB) radio by the traveling public and the use of personal miniature devices for monitoring protection, communication, and physiological functions are only a few examples of the popularization of new technological innovations.

Some of the newest and most popular volunteer programs have centered around the use of modern technology. Examples include telephone hotlines and CB radio REACT (Radio Emergency Associated Citizens Team) clubs.¹ Service-learning administrators are developing automated training programs that use slide/tape devices. Soon, computerized orientation and training programs will be the norm.

Professional people who volunteer their time to help others less advantaged than themselves can extend their outreach through video and cable TV. The growth of consumer groups and relay satellite broadcasting offer educational outreach in ways never before dreamed of. Colleges and universities see these activities as valuable educational opportunities that give students a chance to stretch their skills.

Volunteers will be able to do more in the way of two-way monitoring of the sick and visitation of the handicapped and shut-in by means of video. The use of CB radio has already placed thousands of "airways" volunteers in the role of crime-stoppers and preventors of personal accidents.

Energy conservation programs are well underway. The Volunteer Bureau of Michigan State University has long had a home rehabilitation program in which students repair deteriorating houses for low-income tenants. Several projects across the country have begun to winterize the homes of the elderly. These programs involve a considerable knowledge of technical procedures and engineering know-how, although volunteers can render services at all levels of complexity. Student organizations are honing their planning and management skills in an effort to reduce the number of houses that waste energy and, in so doing, bankrupt their occupants.

Dispersion of Services—A second trend for the future is the dispersion of services, particularly educational, to larger and more diverse groups throughout this country. In colleges and universities, this trend has been evident over the last 50 years. College admissions, at one time restricted to the elite, the rich, and the males in our country, have broadened to "open admissions," lifelong learning, and free tuition for senior citizens.

Tomorrow's student volunteers will be older, composed of a greater variety of racial and national backgrounds, and will bring with them a greater range of experience. Service-learning programs are beginning to attract middle-aged women returning to the campus prior to re-entering the world of work. Adult learners such as these understand the value of experience and will seek the opportunities of the service-learning commitment.

Noneducational services—medical, transportation, and legal, to name a few—have spread to new sectors of our population. This trend is marked by the continued growth of service-related jobs in comparison to other job opportunities, such as production.

Sense of National Community—A third trend affecting this country has been its increasing sense of national community. For student volunteers, the most immediate change is likely to be the introduction of a national service program. An alternative to military service, public service will eventually require campus-based training. Colleges may well accredit the public service experience, just as the University Year for ACTION and "prior life experience" have been accredited.

This sense of national community is evident in programs such as Common Cause and "Nader's Raiders." Citizen volunteers are assuming responsibility for monitoring the quality of national services throughout the country. As these programs continue to draw upon college students, colleges will in turn accredit the learning experience.

A Case History

These three trends—rapid technological change, dispersion of services, and an increasing sense of national community—are visible in the evolution of one volunteer program on the campus of a large eastern state university. The program began in the mid 1960's when a large number of student volunteer groups involved in a variety of community service projects cropped up on the campus.

The Dean of Student Affairs wanted to provide these projects with both supervision and continuity, and so he established the Office of Community Service. The role of that office was to give focus, training, supervision, and continuity to student volunteer efforts in community service. Individual projects around the campus were consolidated into a single volunteer group with a constitution, by-laws, and a stable budget. This framework resulted in the growth of the number of stu-

¹Richard Mock, "CB Craze Has Impact on Volunteerism," *Voluntary Action Leadership*, Winter, 1977, pp. 9-10.

dent volunteers, which was further aided by the use of a centralized transportation system.

This volunteer group, called "People Active in Community Effort" (PACE), continued through the late 1960's and grew from 10 to 28 different projects involving 400 students. The central purpose of PACE was to give community service, and the motivation of the students was in tune with the times—a desire to help others less advantaged than themselves. The Office of Community Service, which supported PACE, was staffed by a director, a college student personnel specialist, an assistant director who was a former PACE volunteer, and a secretary. The separation between the academic community and the student volunteer effort was greater at that time than it has been since.

In 1973 the Office of Community Service began to fill its staff positions with people experienced in administering student volunteers who also had strong academic teaching credentials. This "tilt" toward the academic center of the university was long-sighted. It helped to bring about an integration of the community service program with the curriculum. As a result, the community service program was given the opportunity to move from student affairs to academic affairs. In addition to administering PACE, the Office of Community Service took on the role of coordinating a university-wide internship program and encouraging the development of academically valuable work/service experiences.

The next campus event was a reduction in faculty and administrative positions. This contributed to the most recent development in the evolution of the volunteer program, the merger of the Cooperative Education Program with the Community Service Office. The new office was named "The Office of Experiential Learning Programs." Its emphasis is on learning by doing. Just as in "pure" volunteering, an experiential learning or field experience is not stable unless the student is: (1) involved in a meaningful contribution to a community agency, (2) supervised, and (3) performing a task which is valuable both to himself and to that agency.

In 1976, the new office gained responsibility for the administration of four kinds of service-learning: (1) the PACE organization, with its traditional volunteer service to the community, (2) volunteer experiences connected with class projects, (3) fully accredited field experiences, and (4) paid service-learning experiences in the form of Cooperative Education and paid internships. All of these programs contribute to the long-range goals of the university.

The coming years will see the traditional volunteer role interface with "survey" or introductory level classes. This kind of program, such as the Volunteer Class Project at the University of Maryland and the Joint Education Project (JEP) at the University of Southern California, will continue to increase because it is low-cost, low-risk, and requires few

prerequisites. Students volunteer, often in the public schools, to fulfill part of their course requirements. In the JEP program, students adapt parts of the content of their college courses and teach the adapted material to elementary and secondary students. We will see an increasing tendency toward the integration of the traditional volunteer role with these class projects that give partial credit for performing it.

A second campus trend is that service-learning classes are becoming larger and are requiring more specially trained faculty to teach them. Programmers will find more of their time devoted to training faculty in how to assess experiential learning and in the use of new instructional technologies. For example, during a 15-month period, the Cooperative Assessment of Experiential Learning (CAEL) group offered 13 two-day workshops to 250 faculty members throughout the United States.

A third campus trend is that the credentials of service-learning coordinators will become more academic. These coordinators will have to administer faculty development workshops and prepare managerial cost-benefit reports, tasks that require a high degree of professionalism. The coordinator of the future will function in academic circles. This trend toward professionalism is evidenced by efforts to verify the educational value of service-learning, by the growth of professional societies such as the Society for Field Experience Education, and by an interest in professional development on the part of coordinators of volunteer programs.

A fourth trend is that the university or college will become the center of most communities. This is part of the trend toward a dispersion of services to new groups throughout society, and will result in the involvement of a greater variety of individuals in service-learning. Older volunteers will bring experience, stability, and maturity to existing volunteer programs. Minorities who have not yet played a proportionately representative role in the college service-learning experience will do so as their second and third generations become college-educated.

Finally, the impact of technology will bring about new kinds of volunteer programs. The influence of CB radio on volunteer programming has already been mentioned. Colleges and universities will develop more complex ways to interrelate community service with educational objectives, particularly those of new courses and majors. Computerized clearinghouses are being developed that match job openings with the educational objectives of various courses. Eventually this kind of programming will enable national and regional clearinghouses to notify increasing numbers of individuals, on a more personal basis, of community service opportunities in line with their particular skills and interests. This will have the effect of broadening student volunteerism. □