Engaging Students and the Community through Study Abroad, Service-Learning, and Civic Engagement

College Graduates' Perspectives on the Effect of Capstone Service-Learning Courses

Seanna M. Kerrigan

Abstract: Service-learning has been promoted as a pedagogy in higher education that deepens students' learning by connecting theory to practice, teaching students skills of citizenship, and empowering them through engagement in projects for the common good. Yet little research has taken place to understand the impact that this pedagogy has on college graduates. The purpose of this study was to document college graduates' perspectives on the effect Capstone service-learning courses had on them three years after graduation. Graduates reported enhanced communication and leadership skills, increased community involvement, deeper appreciation of diversity, and furthered career development. The study also includes challenges faced by participants and suggestions for practitioners in the field of service-learning.

With urgent calls in recent years for colleges and universities to take up the role of educating citizens and to re-connect to their mission to serve the public good, service-learning has emerged as a pedagogy with the possibilities of addressing these important issues. This pedagogy is often carried out in academic programs that engage students with community entities to address pressing societal issues. Although educators understand how to design service-learning programs, it has become increasingly important to also study the long-term outcomes associated with participation in these courses.

One of the largest service-learning programs in the nation is the Senior Capstone at Portland State University (PSU). Each year this program requires approximately 3,000 students to participate in a six-credit service-learning course. At PSU, Capstone courses operate in accordance with the definition of service-learning provided by Driscoll et al. (1998), as they are designed to "combine community service activities with explicit learning objectives, preparation, and reflection" (p. 1). Through the reflection process, students make meaning out of the relationship between theory and practical community experiences. In addition, all Capstone courses are designed to address the four learning goals of the general education program at PSU. Specifically, the courses are designed to improve students':

1. critical thinking skills,
2. communication skills,
3. appreciation of diversity, and
4. understanding of social responsibility (including political engagement).

Despite this intentional programmatic design of Capstone courses, there has been no comprehensive research detailing how students experienced the various service-learning dimensions or whether these courses contributed to any specific outcomes after graduation.

The Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service (GPCNS, 2000) confirmed that this topic of the effect of service-learning courses is of national significance. The group further questioned what we really know "about service as a result of the research that has been done since 1990" (p. i). After conducting an investigation, GPCNS found insufficient data to support conclusions on the question of impact. This is one indication that there is a gap in the literature on service-learning.

Review of the Literature

Previous research confirms that the learning objectives for Capstone courses at PSU are reasonable expectations of service-learning experiences. Numerous studies have shown that as a result of service-learning experiences, participants reported enhanced communication skills (Astin & Sax, 1998; Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Battistoni, 1997; Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon, & Kerrigan, 1996; Jordan, 1994), a greater sense of social responsibility (Astin & Sax 1998; Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Astin et al., 2000; Battistoni, 1997; Buchanan, 1997; Driscoll et al., 1996; Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997; Gilbert, Holdt, & Christopherson, 1998; Giles

& Eyler, 1994; Ikeda, 1999; Kendrick, 1996; Marcus, Howard, & King, 1993; Sax & Astin, 1996, 1997), a greater appreciation of diversity (Astin et al., 1999; Astin et al., 2000; Battistoni, 1997; Driscoll et al., 1996; Giles & Eyler, 1994; Hesser, 1995; Jordan, 1994; Kendrick, 1996; Marcus et al., 1993; Myers-Lipton, 1996), and enhanced critical thinking skills (Astin et al., 2000; Batchelder & Root, 1999; Battistoni, 1997; Berson, 1998; Gilbert et al., 1998; Hesser, 1995; Kendrick, 1996; Marcus et al., 1993; Wechsler & Fogel, 1995).

However, almost all of the cited studies assessed short-term outcomes (i.e., outcomes measured while the students were still in college). The majority of studies with longitudinal data were connected to the national student databases owned by the University of California at Los Angeles (Astin & Sax, 1998; Astin et al., 1999; Sax & Astin, 1996, 1997). In these studies authors were able to look at student data during the four years of college and compare changes from freshman to senior year. But few studied post-graduation effects. Only the Astin et al. (1999) study included data from students five years after graduation. Once again, this lack of longitudinal data indicates a gap in the research relative to the impact service-learning courses have on graduates after they leave the college environment.

Methodology

In order to answer the question of how college graduates perceive the impact of Capstone service-learning experiences three years after graduation, a sample population was identified. Twenty PSU graduates who had completed a Capstone course in 1998–99 were chosen to closely mirror the statistics of the PSU student body. The sample included ten women and four "non-traditional" students (i.e., students who were 30 years or older while participating in the Capstone course). Recruitment of men proved to be more difficult than recruitment of women, and three-fourths of the non-traditional students were women. One shortfall of the study was a failure to recruit non-white participants.

Graduates in this sample accurately reflected the programs of study (i.e., majors) at PSU and completed a wide range of Capstone courses. Some courses served inmates, immigrants, or youth. Others addressed women's issues, technology (video production and geographic information systems), engineering design, and regional history. Of the 20 participants, seven took Capstone courses that provided direct service to clients; 11 focused primarily on indirect service to the community (e.g., through the creation of final products that addressed community issues); and the remaining two took courses that were balanced between direct and indirect service.

One-on-one interviews were conducted with each of the 20 participants following guidelines of Creswell (1994), Patton (1990) and Kvale (1996). Questions

intended to elicit a deeper understanding of graduates' perceptions of their Capstone experiences. An interview protocol was utilized to ensure consistency across interviews. The protocol began with a concrete question asking students to describe their Capstone and the service work they may have performed in the context of the course. The interview then moved progressively to more personal questions about their community involvement, voting habits, profession, and changes they would have made to their Capstone experience. Participants were also asked to identify any challenges they faced during their Capstone experience. The final question in the protocol allowed participants to discuss any pressing issues that were not specifically asked in the interview.

The researcher and an additional reader participated in separate but identical protocols for interview data analysis set forth by Tesch (1990) and Creswell (1994). Transcribed interviews were read to elicit core topics and cluster them into topical themes. Topical themes were tested against the data and reorganized as necessary. The researcher and reader then compared their thematic findings and confirmed the results.

After the interview data was analyzed and preliminary conclusions reached, a focus group was employed to verify and clarify initial findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Topical themes were shared to confirm for accuracy or expand as warranted. Six of the 20 original participants participated in a follow-up focus group that took place nine months later. This group consisted of three men and three women representing both direct service (tutoring) and indirect service (engineering and history projects). Two of the six were non-traditional students.

Results

A comparison of themes identified by the researcher/reader and focus group participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Themes Identified by Researcher/Reader and Focus Group Participants

Researcher/Reader	Focus Group Participants
Communication	Communication in teams and with clients
Leadership/project management	Leadership • ownership of project • setting goals and deadlines • independent thinking
"Border crossing"/diversity	Working with diverse populations
Career development/ real-world experience	Career development • "real-time learning" • working with clients • working with teams • accountability • ideas for jobs
Involvement in the community (future volunteerism)	Community connection • connection with people, organizations, parts of town • "one person can make a difference" • desire to volunteer • the different "publics" in a community
Suggestions for the future (including criticism/challenges with service-learning) • time • group process • organizational issues	Challenges • time commitment • more choices of courses • dealing with "slackers" • faculty not prepared to facilitate group process/ project management/reflection • learn more about clients before entering service • make sure there is reflection time in class to process orally • no place on Capstone course evaluation to evaluate faculty's ability to facilitate
Lack of political connection	Confirmed political connection for some and not for others

The graduates' descriptions utilized language almost identical to that of the researcher/reader. However, they frequently gave greater detail in predicting the outcomes. The respondents also confirmed the most common challenges present in their service-learning experiences. Focus-group participants' predictions of the outcomes and challenges mirrored the data found in the individual interviews; participants named every one of the outcomes found in the interviews. They also confirmed and further expanded upon the challenges experienced in Capstones.

Topical Themes

Communication. The most common theme found across the interviews was that Capstone service-learning courses furthered college graduates' ability to communicate and listen effectively in collaborative contexts. Sixteen participants remarked that they gained valuable lessons in multiple forms of communication (i.e., interpersonal connections with others, oral presentations, written communication, and visual expression). Graduates who worked in direct-service Capstone courses mentioned refining interpersonal skills more frequently, while graduates working on indirect service projects discussed the enhancement of writing and presentation skills. Participants also articulated gaining specific skills in facilitating meetings, listening, communicating in groups, and conducting public presentations. In addition, they enhanced their abilities to communicate with various populations (e.g., youth, prisoners, professionals in the community, peers). Finally, participants reported learning the value of interactions across disciplinary divisions and negotiating organizational territories in the community. Repeatedly, participants described enhancing their communication skills through working with their peers, sharing information in their groups, and collaborating with community organizations. One graduate shared:

> I learned that I have a really hard time working with other people and sharing information, which was a good experience, because I had always thought I would …work well in groups. I was challenged…By the end we had learned how to communicate pretty well…and I was never the best writer in the world, [but] my writing skills and research skills just completely bloomed when I did that project. I felt by the end really confident…like I could go back and do that again. Phenomenal skills.

Furthermore, respondents' communication skills were enhanced by the professional context of their Capstones, in which they were challenged to write public documents, utilize technology, and make public presentations.

Leadership. A second and related theme that emerged from the data was that 15 of the 20 participants enhanced their leadership skills. These graduates consistently spoke of gaining confidence in promoting new ideas, leading peer groups, managing project teams, and serving as advocates for others. Graduates repeatedly commented about how Capstone service-learning experiences prepared them to initiate, organize, and complete collaborative projects in their professional lives. Respondents appreciated the opportunity to coordinate professional-level

projects that mirrored the "real-world" tasks required of them after graduation. They emphasized how the Capstone taught them to take on leadership roles, rather than study leadership from a theoretical perspective. Many indicated that it was the first time they had been given the opportunity to engage as a leader in their educational process. A software engineer remarked:

> I left [the Capstone] thinking, if a person wanted to go into business, that would be a great class to let somebody [to develop] the skills that they need to be able to consult themselves out in a professional way to run their own business…I mean, it was really comprehensive from start to finish. Especially [as] I went on in my career, it really helped me to be mature in the way of project management.

Community Involvement/Volunteering. The third theme that emerged from the data was a positive attitude toward involvement in their community (reported by 13 of the 20 participants). Men and women equally reported the value of volunteering in their communities. This theme was reflected in clear statements from the graduates about engaging in the community during Capstone courses, continuing volunteering after college, and contributing to the community through professional service. One participant stated:

> I think that a lot of people, a lot of students or young people really want to volunteer but they never really know how to go about it. And so this provided me an opportunity and an excuse to get involved in a volunteer project that was interesting to me, and it was amazing. I've heard people talk about volunteering before and how much it changes your life, but…I didn't realize how much it did until I was doing it and it gave me access to this population that I'd never been involved with but it also really made me feel as if I was important in the world, and in the scheme of things, and that I had a place.

Participants who continued their community involvement after college stated that the primary way they remained involved in the community was through pro bono professional service. When these graduates were first asked if they were involved in the community, their most common answer was "no"—at least not as traditional volunteers. However, over half of the graduates cited their work or professional service activities as contributions that they were proud to offer to the community. Many respondents saw their contribution to the community as an extension of their profession by offering pro bono work. One multi-media specialist noted:

> We do an awful lot of [pro bono work] in my company. Here we do a lot of giving away of the work that we do and our time and effort. We've chosen to do that…we've done some things for the American Red Cross local chapter, done a lot of work with them free of charge. We helped them build an organization website just to get them started because it's a skill that we have and it was something that we just wanted them to be able to do.

Appreciation of Diversity/Border Crossing. The fourth theme that emerged from the data was students' exposure to and deeper understandings of new populations. Eleven participants described this process as a journey of interacting with populations from which they had traditionally been segregated. Participants also became aware of how borders prohibit various individuals from interacting with one another. Therefore, I chose to call this theme *border crossing.* Graduates described some of their most profound learning with regards to this theme.

As participants crossed borders into new domains, they became more aware of the intricacies of social issues, including the challenges facing immigrants, youth, and survivors of domestic violence. Instead of simply learning a broad-stroke theory pertaining to these social issues, respondents experienced the complexities embedded in providing services to various populations. Participants became aware of how borders exist that prohibit people from interacting with one another. Further, participants were not merely polishing existing skills, but rather developing new ways of thinking about diverse populations, the lives of others, the various contexts and constraints impacting others, and their relationships with one another. As one respondent in the focus group stated, she became more aware of "the many publics that constituted the community."

A professional and graduate student in the field of Administration of Justice (AJ) described her Capstone as a powerful catalyst for border crossing as she learned about the youth who live in a lockdown facility. She described:

> In AJ classes or soc. or psych., they just throw numbers at you, they don't really give you individual cases. Whereas when you're working with these kids, these are the numbers and it makes you realize that each child, I mean each of those numbers is affected differently…I mean, you can sit and take months of different classes but until you actually interact with these children you have no idea what you're dealing with, each child's different, and just like the lockdown, like being in it, like when that door clicks, you're stuck there….They can warn you the first time you go…but until you hear that click…you don't really know what you're in for.

She crossed a border that few people cross and found that she:

> had a lot of preconceived ideas about anyone in lockdown. It's a lot easier to write off those numbers…as "oh well, they deserve it."… Going there and hearing the kids' backgrounds and everything, it kind of forces you to realize that these kids might have choices… but how much did they have?…[I]n a way going there was bad… because when you're listening to the news or something you can't write it off as "they deserve it."…Then when you look back on whatever kid stuck out in your mind… that did that same crime it's like well maybe their parents were doing this, you know, why are we locking them down, when we should maybe be treating them, 'cause a lot of the kids had drug convictions. It caused you more to think of them as humans, not numbers.

Career Development. The fifth theme that emerged was the impact that Capstone courses had on participants' career development. Although not usually found in service-learning literature, it was one of the most prominent themes to emerge from the data. When talking about the development of their leadership and project management skills, 16 of the 20 graduates reinforced that the Capstone enhanced skills needed to be successful in their chosen fields. In addition, respondents frequently stated that Capstone courses helped clarify their career aspirations and earn recommendations to acquire future jobs. Regarding a recommendation letter from a partnering community organization, one business student stated:

> I was very blown away with how well it was written and it just knocked me out. I showed it to some professionals, including some people in the college, [and they said] "You must have really done an exceptional job….This is a very good recommendation letter." It was incredible….What I learned in the Capstone class that really helped me in success for business was [that] you can do a lot more than jobs tell you…just by presenting a decision, presenting plans, presenting information, doing all the research…. You can get promoted pretty quick with your own business plan.

Throughout the interviews and focus group, the graduates credited the Capstone experience with helping them gain skills and confidence to work successfully in their careers. They viewed the Capstone as an important endeavor because it made them responsible and accountable to work with and produce for a customer or client, which was a new experience for a large majority of the students. Many talked about how the Capstone informed the way they supervise others in a professional context.

Lack of Connection between Social and Political Issues. The sixth theme that emerged from the data was a disconnect between the social issues addressed in the Capstone course and their relationship to larger political issues. Interestingly, 17 out of the 20 participants reported voting on a regular basis. Each of the 17 reported voting both before and after participating in the Capstone. Often, respondents cited family expectations as a common reason for voting in such high numbers: "I grew up in [a nearby community], and if I don't go and vote, my parents can see if I'm marked off, if I voted or not….[So], I'm forced to vote, 'cause if I don't I hear it from my dad the next day."

Despite this high degree of self-reported voting, when asked if there was a connection between the community work performed in their Capstone and political issues involved in various campaigns, only seven out of the 20 participants answered affirmatively. Only one-third of these graduates made conceptual connections between the social issues they engaged with in their courses and the political sphere; the other two-thirds did not.

One woman who went on to pursue a master's degree in Administration of Justice made the connection between a local ballot measure and her service site:

> Measure 11 [a mandatory minimum-sentencing law passed by Oregon voters in a ballot measure] is a huge one, with locking kids down that are 16 into the penitentiary….[Youth are] more protected [in the juvenile detention center than] if you put a 15-, 16-, 17-year-old in Oregon State Penitentiary… for a mandatory sentence of seven-and-a-half years….[It] doesn't make any sense to me that you think you're gonna get a productive citizen afterwards….I don't think when they voted that in that people understood that their kids getting in a fight at a party could end up in the penitentiary for seven-and-a-half years….And I'm not a very big political person and I don't understand a whole lot of the realm of voting, I mean I vote, but I don't…understand [how] the whole works, but that one has caught my attention because of working with those kids.

Many participants were surprised that there was even a question related to voting in the interview. One participant said, "I like the environment and I try and vote for people who are gonna protect it, but I don't really see the connection [between the Capstone and political issues]." Another respondent who participated in a Capstone partnered with the Portland school system (which has experienced a ten-year-old funding shortfall due to failures of various ballot measures) stated:

> No, [no connection] at all. For us [politics] just wasn't an issue,
> I don't think….If I remember correctly, there were a couple of
> women who were involved in politics on their own…they were
> involved in it before the…class, but the class itself was completely
> separate from politics.

Findings Related to Gender

In this study both men and women reported the outcomes discussed as
enhancing their communication skills, leadership skills, community involvement,
understanding of diversity and career development. Interestingly, men and
women equally reported the value of volunteering in their community even
though women are frequently perceived as the service providers or volunteers for
community causes in the United States. However, male and female participants
described their most important learning in distinctly different terms. Out of the
10 men interviewed, eight described their most important learning in terms of
transferable professional skills they could take with them into the work world
such as leadership development, project management, professionalism, group
process skills, and self-efficacy. Men also reported learning valuable insights about
how to work in teams, motivate others, create timelines, and get things done in
professional contexts. One male participant stated that his primary learning was
"definitely finding out where I stand and what my skills are with managing people."
A mid-level manager expressed that his most important learning was that:

> [you] can have a lot more influence than jobs tell you…[by]
> presenting a decision, presenting plans, presenting information,
> doing all the research so you actually propose a plan…. You can
> get promoted pretty quickly with your own plan….[I learned
> about] leadership….I took a proactive role….I got the ball rolling.
> Definitely leadership. Definitely proactive role.

In comparison, women described a wider range of outcomes resulting from
their Capstone experiences. Women's important reflections were more likely to
be related to their engagement with the population they were working with rather
than project management and leadership skills. Out of the 10 women interviewed,
five said that their most important learning related to insights about diverse
populations. Other responses included learning to conduct complex research
projects, more about specific social issues, more about the city of Portland, and
teaching techniques in a public school classroom. One woman stated:

I certainly became much more culturally aware than I was before….I'm able
to advise students better based on my experiences with certain cultures at IRCO

[Immigrant and Refugee Community of Oregon]….I became much more aware of political problems in the world…what the refugee populations [are] and why and when and how, so that helps me also with the background of students that I work with….I also learned more about immigration law….My most important learning was how well I interacted with people of all cultures.

One contributing factor to the differences between males' and females' most important learning may lie in the types of Capstone courses that each chose to complete. Women had selected courses with more direct contact with a wider variety of community members, whereas men had more exposure to community research projects. The contrast in service experiences may account for at least one reason why men and women report different "most important learnings" from their Capstone experiences.

Challenges Reported by Respondents

Participants in the study described six challenges faced in their Capstone experiences at PSU. First, although the process of working in groups contributed significantly to student learning outcomes, it was also the area in which participants voiced their most common concern. Graduates remembered struggling with the interdisciplinary nature of the groups, the varied levels of responsibility taken on by group members (e.g., what to do with "the slacker"), and the challenge of coordinating their schedules with peers.

Second, respondents stated that they wished they had greater time to focus on the project rather than juggling so many demands (including family, jobs, and other courses).

Third, there were relatively few Capstone courses from which to choose in 1997. In any given term, there may have been only 10–15 Capstones offered. As a result, some participants ended up in projects that did not seem to fit into their areas of study or personal interest.

Fourth, there was lack of organization in a few of the Capstone courses. Participants from three different Capstone courses described feeling like "guinea pigs" as instructors juggled course and community partner logistics (including on-site orientations and trainings). Respondents also recommended greater communication with the community partner, as community organizations were not always as involved in providing feedback to the participants as they had wished.

Fifth, students disliked the structure of journal writing in these courses. Frequently, the graduates referred to the journals as logs recording "time on task" rather than as reflective assignments to help make meaning from their experience.

Finally, focus group participants suggested better faculty training in facilitating student groups. Several respondents reported feeling thrown into the group setting

with virtually no support, especially when there was a communication breakdown between group members.

Discussion

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

The primary limitation of this study is the size of the sample. While 20 subjects was ideal for a qualitative study examining the lived experiences of graduates, the size limits the author's ability to make broad generalizations about most college graduates' engagement in service-learning courses. One significant flaw within the small sample size was the absence of ethnic minorities in the study. No ethnic minorities responded to the invitation to participate in the study. PSU is a predominantly Caucasian campus (only 18% of the population identify as an ethnic minority), but more effort needs to take place in the future to recruit non-white respondents. Since there has not been sufficient research on how various ethnic groups have experienced service-learning experiences, there is no hypothesis on how the lack of minorities impacted the outcomes of this research. This is an area ripe for future exploration.

Moreover, future studies are needed to deepen our understanding of the impact that service-learning has on graduates' civic and political engagement. Missing in this study was a question asking students to define "political" or "civic" engagement and how they believe they could demonstrate their political beliefs in the world. Researchers need to better understand college students' perceptions of their responsibility to serve the "public" and their relationship to this notion of public good. For example, studies on graduates' civic engagement could include assessments of beliefs beyond voting, such as the value placed on contributing to the public good, community organizing, participation in public dialogues, conflict resolution, understanding of political processes, analysis of public policies, "boycotting" and "buycotting" products based on their means of production, and other types of civic actions. These measures could help the field of higher education assess whether graduates take political action in their communities, the various ways they do engage, and how they understand the concepts such as political engagement and contributing to the public good.

Throughout the literature on service-learning, authors traditionally report the outcomes associated with participation in service-learning courses, but rarely do researchers examine the data for the different ways these experiences may impact men and women. This study offers preliminary evidence that gender differences may, in fact, play a role in the long-term outcomes of service-learning experiences.

Finally, this study discovered that graduates who were involved in Capstone service-learning courses tended to donate their time to their community by contributing high-level pro bono professional skills (e.g., engineering, high-tech, multi-media design, teaching, coordination of international community events) to local non-profit and governmental agencies. Literature in the field has not focused on the topic of *how* college graduates contribute to the community. These initial findings may serve as a guide to examine whether there is a national trend for service-learning participants to serve their communities in high-skilled pro bono work to their community. Exploration on alumni surveys and in national databases on college graduates are two possibilities to further this research. Thousands of alumni could confirm whether participation in service-learning courses resulted in increased contribution of volunteer services to the community and further describe what skills they offer in their communities. In fact, this recommendation has been implemented by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) in the modification of its 2004 post-graduate survey. HERI will include a question on the pro bono contributions made by college graduates, which will be administered to 300,000 graduates. The intent is to study the impact of various college experiences (including service-learning courses) on graduates who have been out of college for ten years.

Recommendations for Practitioners

Several recommendations emerge from this work to improve faculty teaching and deepen student learning in service-learning Capstone courses. The first recommendation is to intentionally enhance the quality of the reflective practices facilitated in service-learning courses. Too frequently, participants reported the use of journals as logs of activities rather than tools to make deep cognitive connections between their service experiences, course concepts, and social and political issues. Reflection should encourage students to make connections between their service work and the political/civic implications of that work. Without this explicit connection, students working on issues such as education and the environment may only see these as social issues to address in a volunteer capacity rather than complex systemic issues deeply impacted by public policies and political agendas.

In order to assist faculty in exploring the notion of making connections between the social issues in their courses and larger systemic political issues, this author co-sponsored faculty development seminars in which faculty explored these connections. As a result of this professional development, faculty documented their plans to make civic and political links more explicit in their courses. Course evaluations have shown that the students enrolled in Capstone courses where faculty have redesigned their assignments to make more explicit the connection between local service work and broader civic implications reported greater agreement that their Capstone courses enhanced their understanding of social and political issues. Furthermore, students

have reported a higher level of responsibility to meet the needs of their community (Cress, Kerrigan, & Reitenauer, 2003).

Further, this research revealed that reflection activities must continuously challenge all students to explore issues of diversity. In this study, women were more likely to report new understandings of diverse populations than men. In order to begin addressing this discrepancy, faculty must encourage all students to reflect upon concepts such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and other social identity categories as appropriate within the course context.

Finally, graduates in this study suggested that faculty need to gain greater skill in communicating effectively with community partners and facilitating group processes. This includes:

1. educating faculty on the stages of group development,
2. giving faculty tools to assist students in assessing their strengths and weaknesses in groups, and
3. providing information to faculty on how to teach students to facilitate effective meetings as well as how to handle conflict in groups.

Since the mission of institutions of higher education is in part to create effective citizens, then leaders must take responsibility to help prepare faculty to engage in civic education for students.

Conclusion

Upon observing the list of national conferences in higher education in 2004, I recognized that there was an overwhelming cry for institutions of higher education to take seriously the task of developing effective citizens for participation in the public good. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U, 2004) articulated that higher education is responsible for educating graduates capable of making judgments in the context of evolving geopolitics, fluctuating global economies, diminishing natural resources, and continuing racial/ethnic and cultural differences both domestically and internationally. We owe it to our students to help them develop the competencies to link diverse areas of knowledge in practical unscripted, complex problems.

Service-learning is highlighted throughout these conferences as a powerful pedagogy, capable of engaging students with the community for the good of the public and creating graduates fully able to solve interdisciplinary societal problems. These hopes for service-learning make it imperative to continuously improve the quality of these courses and to further assess the impact that they have on college graduates.

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