Community-based Learning I Track Summary

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Community-based learning (CBL) reflects the principle that political science courses should do more than simply teach students about politics. As participants in the community-based learning track, we believe that courses in our discipline should equip students with the combination of knowledge, skills, and values required to engage in a life of active citizenship. Designing a course that meets these goals is not impossible. Community-based projects include several different types of experiential learning, including: service-learning, community-based learning, and community-based research. We believe that all of these forms of learning about, from, and with the community inspire and encourage students to live an active political life.

CBL also provides an opportunity to close the gap between teaching and learning by moving away from memorization toward analysis and application. Educational research makes it clear that many college courses fail to challenge students' preconceived world views in ways that leads to deep learning (Bain 2004). Through CBL, students are exposed to a diversity of people, places, and social circumstances; such experiences serve to challenge preconceived notions about groups and individuals in society. The dynamic application of course concepts in a "real-world" setting encourages active citizenship while combating apathy, and may also help students to develop valuable interpersonal and vocational skills.

Putting the "L" in Community-based Learning

Community-based learning projects must be integral to course design. Ironically, many of the goals of community-based learning are reached in the classroom. It may be difficult for students to conceptualize what they are seeing and doing in the moment of service; however, when given a framework within which they can explore and reflect upon their activities, students make critical causal linkages. There are several ways to link community-based service and research with course content, including: assigned texts, classroom discussion, classroom simulation, and structured reflection. Promoting learning outcomes in a structured manner is vital to distinguishing community-based learning from simple volunteerism.

Taking it to the Streets

Community-based learning course designs require substantial prior planning to work with university and community partners to conduct proper needs assessment. Aligning course content with community-based projects is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for successfully meeting community-based learning goals. Track participants stressed the importance of building strong community relationships with individuals, groups, and agencies. Some communities may perceive community-based learning projects to be paternalistic and patronizing, or at least out of touch with problems outside of the ivory tower. There are strategies to mitigate this distrust. Students should "do what needs doing," rather than making assumptions about community needs. Faculty members can aid in this process by cultivating long-term relationships with local groups and agencies, as well as staying informed about local issues and problems. Once community relationships have been established, they must be maintained. Students should be reminded that they are making a significant commitment that requires them to show up and act professionally. Therefore, it is critical for all stakeholders involved to clarify their expectations of the project's implementation and outcome. It is also important to thank community partners, both informally and with formal awards or recognition.

Faculty members should leverage all available institutional resources to help build these key community relationships. Our track participants came from a wide variety of institutions with varying resources; some had the benefit of a full-time service learning center, while others tried to do everything themselves or relied on student assistants as leadership trainers. Track members agreed that institutional support is critical to a successful CBL project. Teaching and learning centers, service learning centers, student unions, work-study programs, and government-funded positions (i.e., VISTA) are all useful resources for campus-based CBL programs. It is also important to integrate CBL into the institutional mission and curriculum.

The Payoff: Assessing the Impact of CBL

Although we are convinced that community-based learning is an important pedagogical tool, your institution's administrators, faculty members, students, and alumni may demand concrete evidence. Track participants used different methods for assessing both short- and long-term learning and attitudinal outcomes. Pre- and post-class surveys and interviews, content analysis of students' written reflections or classroom comments, and focus groups are valuable tools for assessment, as are case studies of the individual experiences of students and community partners. Because community-based learning is designed with the end-goal of enhanced civic engagement and active citizenship, its effects may not be immediate. Longitudinal studies of alumni who participated in CBL courses and projects are useful for assessing long-term impacts. Another long-term assessment mechanism involves a college-wide entrance and exit survey that can be compared with national surveys about community service and civic engagement.

Track participants mentioned several benefits of impact assessment including enhanced opportunities for: evidence-based curricular reform, SoTL presentations and publications, grant money, and enhanced cooperation from university and community partners. As political scientists, track participants believe evidence supports CBL pedagogies as significant tools for "deep learning" of key disciplinary skills, methods, and concepts. As we show our students, our colleagues, and our neighbors the benefits of CBL, they will become stronger partners in promoting the ideals and values of active learning and active citizenship.

Reference

Bain, Ken. 2004. *What the Best College Teachers Do.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Community and Service-based Learning II Track Summary

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A diverse gathering of academics convened to discuss Community and Service-based Learning (CBSL). The common bond amongst all was the belief that developing tangible linkages with the

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community through myriad "service" instruments is critical in producing a holistic educational experience. Our common agreement was that CBSL programs must be well-structured, academically rigorous, and properly assessed and evaluated in order for students to obtain the most out of the experiences. The goal of CBSL II was to address these issues and discuss what does and does not work.

The P3 Model—Planning, Planning, and More Planning

In order for CBSL to be successful, planning is fundamental. The majority of the leg work (initial meetings with community leaders, internship liaisons, and host/internship sites) must be done before hand. Beyond the initial academic/community and service-learning contact where the commitments and goals of the academic institution are established, early planning stages should also include identification of key players, establishing trust between the community/internship host site/service-learning organizers and the academic institution, and the completion of as much administrative paperwork as possible.

CBSL II Typologies

CBSL II participants shared numerous models and typologies that rigorously engaged students both inside and outside of the classroom (the overarching goal was to connect work outside of the classroom with solid academic principles espoused inside of the classroom). Leanne Doherty created a pilot internship program with a required writing infusion course to meet an institution's Writing Across the Curriculum agenda. Judithanne Scourfield McLauchlan used experiential learning to supplement her course on the Florida courts. Edward Warzala and Michael Stone utilized learning contracts as a means of combining the best aspects of community-based learning and the cognitive, affective, and behavior goals of higher education. David Redlawsk and Nora Wilson used a "job fair" model to introduce students to city council campaigns. Kendra King holds a semester-long course on community building which convenes with a "summit" of community leaders, political officials, and university members as a means of connecting all sides. All papers underscored the need for a balance between service-based learning objectives and academic/discipline pedagogy.

Methodology

One of the fundamental themes (as well as intense discussions) emanating from CBSL II evolved around complimentary, competing, and seemingly contradictory pedagogical patterns. Our discussions revealed a variety of methodological tools used to track students' progress in their placements, including: guided journaling, writing reflections, field notes, portfolio building, group reflection, contracts, oversight, and feedback loops. Brigid Harrison and Quentin Kidd incorporated a long-term commitment model for their internship and intensive leadership program. Their model required students to complete both pre- and post-program civic engagement surveys. Margaret Post and Adam Reich discussed story telling as an effective community organizing tool for students involved in a variety of local level democratic processes. And Christine Pappas asked students to journal their experiences interacting with and "cleaning-up" a local community during a week-long project. Many of the pedagogical tools utilized in CBSL II were similar. Interestingly, in his paper detailing the transition from service learning to civic learning, Steven Jones presented a typology of successful methods of pedagogy that were nicely echoed and supported through other track participants' research and presentations.

Assessment

Our track unanimously agreed that layered assessment was essential to CBSL programs. These assessment methods included formative and summative assessments (pre- and post- program), stakeholder discussions, evaluations from and by different audiences, and assessments of students' knowledge, skills, and disposition. Participants emphasized layered assessments as important in order to satisfy several constituency bases, including donors, deans, department chairs, and students. Moreover, effective assessment(s) foster solid and meaningful relationships and partnerships with the communities the academic institutions seek to serve.

Final Thoughts

One general viewpoint expressed was the challenge of creating and carrying out CBSL projects. Participants were conscious of the viewpoint that stereotypes this type of learning as lacking scholarly rigor. Additional challenges to engaging in CBSL include: 1) balancing university and community interests; 2) assisting students in fulfilling multiple demands and responsibilities; and 3) faculty support (especially for untenured faculty) in incorporating CBSL into tenure and promotion.

In spite of these concerns, CBSL programs are ongoing, wide-ranging, and expanding. Undoubtedly, students, faculty, and community members have found value in learning outside the classroom. Whether the course leads to a life in politics, community service, or makes students conscientious voters, a successful learning experience has taken place.

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