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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