Leveraging the Prism Effect of Service Learning in Community Colleges

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The Prism Effect of Service Learning: Impact on Students

Evidence from three national studies in AACC projects

- 2003-2006: SL and civic engagement
- 2006-2009: SL and academic learning outcomes
- 2009-2012: SL and student retention and persistence

3,274 students / Demographically diverse
26 colleges / 18 states
Multiple disciplines / Pre- and post-course surveys / Student and faculty focus groups
SL and Civic Engagement

Service learners (n = 279) scored higher than nonservice learners (n = 145) on knowledge and behavior:

Always votes in national elections
Knows name of community's chief elected official
Knows when city/tribal council meetings are held
Contacts elected officials re important issues
Plans to volunteer in next 12 months

Conclusion: Service learning students are more civically engaged and aware
Conclusion: Service learners report higher gains in learning outcomes and workforce skills.
SL and Retention

Influence of Service Learning on Five Retention-Positive Factors for CC Students (n = 416 SL, n = 117 NSL)

Commitment to obtaining my educational goals
Confidence about being successful in the academic environment
Connection with other students
Connection with faculty
Involvement in campus activities

Conclusion: Service learners report a greater likelihood to stay in school
Service Learning’s Prism Effect

• A student’s experience in the community is **transformed into multiple outcomes** that emerge from the prism of service learning.

• A **single semester** of service learning can produce these outcomes, even when instructors do not have additional outcomes in mind when integrating service learning into their courses.

• Service learning is an intervention that provides **multiple paths for students to succeed** in and beyond their college years.
The Prism Effect at Your College

• Which outcomes in the spectrum have you noticed at your institution?

• Which outcomes have you measured and how?

• Which outcomes are strong in your own community engagement courses, programs, or activities?

• Which outcomes need more work?

• Which is the most important outcome for your institution right now? For your community? For your students?

• Are there other outcomes that could be added to the spectrum?
The Prism Effect at Your College

Further research questions

• What is the role of faculty-guided reflection in helping students pay attention to and make meaning of less obvious outcomes?

• How are the outcomes affected by dosage? Student self-selection or predisposition? Faculty training and experience? Individual vs. group service?

• How might this student-outcomes prism be translated to outcomes for faculty, partners, and institutions?
Campus Compact 2014 Membership Survey

• 69 community college responses (16% of total)
• Many prism outcomes are addressed in colleges’ strategic plans
  • Service to the community (68%)
  • Education for global citizenship (61%)
  • Student civic engagement (55%)
  • Student leadership development (54%)
  • Student civic learning (46%)
  • Careers for the public good (30%)
Campus Compact 2014 Membership Survey

• AACU’s LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes addressed in strategic plans also mirror the prism
  • Critical thinking (81%)
  • Written communication (74%)
  • Oral communication (72%)
  • Problem solving (58%)
  • Local civic knowledge and engagement (55%)
  • Teamwork (42%)

• Yet practitioners often fail to use these to leverage institutional support for their programs
Campus Compact 2014 Membership Survey

- 83% of CCs never applied for Carnegie Community Engagement Classification
  - Use it as a benchmarking tool
  - Apply and use feedback to improve your programs

- 49% of CCs have no mechanisms for systematically assessing community impact (a requirement for Carnegie classification)
  - Use Carnegie-classified institutions’ examples and strategies
  - Work with institutional research office
  - Partner with a nearby college or university for assistance
Discussion

• Knowing what we know about the prism effect of service learning, how can practitioners use it to leverage more support and resources from administrators?
Report Out: Leveraging the Prism

- Establish a SL/CE advisory committee
- Ask community partners to write testimonial letters to administrators and trustees and to help design courses
- Ask students to write, tweet, and post about their experiences
- Provide student ambassador or similar leadership opportunities
- Assess engagement in accreditation self-studies
- Ghost-write articles, op-eds, and blogs for presidents
- Encourage employers to hire service learners for their civic skills as well as their job skills
The Prism Effect: A Charge to Colleges

- Align community engagement with larger initiatives, ideas, and mission
  - Student success and completion efforts
  - Institutional and program accreditation
  - Workforce and economic development
  - Living in and contributing to a diverse democratic society
- Incorporate community engagement across the curriculum
  - Don’t let lack of funding deter progress
  - Find faculty and online sources for training and sharing
  - Seek partners to build long-term reciprocal relationships
  - Make students’ education useful and beneficial
Bonus Topic

Do you partner with any of the following in your service learning and community engagement efforts?

- State historical society
- Local museums
- Historical sites
- Art centers
- Cultural organizations
- Zoos
- Planetariums
- Botanical gardens
- Nature centers
For More Information

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Survey: www.compact.org/initiatives/membership-survey

Carnegie Classification: www.nerche.org