

***Transforming Our Mission:
Institutionalizing Civic
Engagement through
Experiential Learning***

Arlene L. Dowshen, Ed.D.

Stuart Eimer, Ph.D.

Marcine Pickron-Davis, Ph.D.

September 26, 2008

37th Annual NSEE Conference

Orlando, FL

Service-Learning at Widener University

- Student Services Committee (2000-2001)
- Faculty Bridge Week (May 2001)
- Informal Monthly Service-Learning Group Meetings (2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2004)
- Arrival of President Harris at Widener (July 2002)
- Announcement of Academic Service-Learning Faculty Development Program (Spring 2004)

Service-Learning at Widener University (cont'd)

- First Cohort of Academic Service-Learning Faculty Development Program Fellows (Fall 2004)
- PHENND Learn & Serve subgrant for institutionalizing service learning (2006)
- Academic Community Service-Learning Committee established (Spring 2007)
- First Recognition Event for Community Partners (April, 2008)

Academic Service-Learning Faculty Development Program

- Purpose
- Structure of Program
- Application and Selection Process
- Implementation of Program
- Components of Program

Components of Program

- Tour of Chester
- Weekly Faculty Seminars
- Guest Speakers
- Readings
- Working with Community Partners
- Assessing What We Do

Components of Program (cont'd)

- Volunteer Fair
- Workshops for Faculty
- Service-Learning Resources
- Funding for Resources, Conferences, etc.
- Assistance with Community Contacts (Arlene and Marcine)
- Institutionalizing Service-Learning

Readings

- Campus Compact. (2004). *Essential Resources*.
- Campus Compact. (2003). *Introduction to Service-Learning Toolkit*. (2nd Ed.).
- Eyler & Giles. (1999). *Where's the Learning in Service-Learning?*

Working with Community Partners

“...the natural development of university community partnerships begins with work between the university and well-organized local agencies and organizations that have the capacity and sophistication to interface with the more bureaucratic university.”

(B. Holland & S. Gelmon. (2003). The State of the Engaged Campus: What We Learned About Building and Sustaining University-Community Partnerships. In *Introduction to Service-Learning Toolkit*. Providence, RI: Campus Compact, p. 197.)

Office of Community Engagement (OCE)

The OCE serves as the university liaison and the President's delegate to enhance community relations within the university and with the local community. The OCE advances Widener's mission to contribute to the vitality and well-being of the communities we serve by providing leadership in fostering a civically-engaged campus community reflected in academically based scholarship and outreach activities.

Service-Learning Community Partners (Chester, PA)

- The Bernadine Center
- Chester Boys and Girls Club
- Chester Eastside Ministries
- Chester Education Foundation
- Chester Historical Preservation Foundation
- Chester Senior Center
- Chester/Upland School District
- Chester Weed and Seed

Service-Learning Community Partners (cont'd)

- Chester Youth Collaborative
- Crozer-Chester Medical Center
- Delaware County Housing Coalition
- Freeman Cultural Arts/Nia Center
- St. Catherine Drexel School
- Salvation Army
- Social Work Consultation Services
- YWCA of Chester

Widener University Service-Learning Courses

- COMS 380 Advertising Campaigns
- ED/PSY Educational Psychology
- MGT 352 Operations Management
- PRWR 230 Script Writing
- PRWR 260 Intro. to Professional Writing
- SOC 266 Class Society
- SOC 325 Poverty and Society

Reflection Activity

- What are the hopes and fears you have for your service-learning course/program?
- What brings you to this type of teaching/work?
- What are the challenges you will face?

From Faculty Fellow to Faculty Practitioner

- Participant in Second Cohort (2005)
- ***Time/space*** to Engage Academic Literature on Service-Learning
- ***Trainings and Skill Development***
 - Diffusions of Best Practices
 - Diversity Workshop

From Faculty Fellow to Faculty Practitioner

- Course Release to ***Develop Curriculum***
 - Collect Materials
 - Contact Other Academics
 - Contact Community Partners

- Opportunity for ***Dialogue*** Across Disciplines
 - Building Bridges between Disciplines
 - Sharing of Experience and Best Practices

From Faculty Fellow to Faculty Practitioner

- ***Legitimacy*** to Service-Learning
 - From “Fringe” Activity to “Central” to University’s Mission
 - Eased Skepticism in Division and Facilitated Scheduling
- Opportunity to ***Discuss and Help Set University Policy***
 - Course Size?
 - How Should Courses be Labeled in the Schedule

From Faculty Fellow to Faculty Practitioner

- Freshmen Seminar 101: Civic Engagement and Society
 - Students Use Class Time to Develop Strategy and Tactics for a Holiday Toy Drive with Community Partner
- Soc 266 Class Society
 - Students Tutor Low Income Students in Community Partner's Afterschool Program
- Soc 325 Poverty and Society
 - Students Tutor Low Income Students in Community Partner's Afterschool Program

Faculty and Community Partner Assessment

- Introductory Seminar Evaluation
- Faculty Survey*
- Interview each faculty member two years after starting program
- Community Partner Interviews**

*American Association of Community Colleges, Brevard Community College Center for Service-Learning, <http://www.natcom.org/Instructional/sl-new/AssessmentResources.htm>, and Gelmon, S.B., et al. (2001). *Assessing service-learning and civic engagement, principles and techniques*. Providence, RI: Campus Compact.

**<http://www.natcom.org/Instruction/sl-new/AssessmentResources.htm> was used to prepare this part of the survey.

Successes and Challenges of Our Program

Preliminary Data from Our Faculty Fellows:

What aspect(s) of this program was most helpful to you?

- Opportunity to interact with and learn from other faculty in the group
- Handouts and resource books
- Guest speakers, tours, variety of activities

Successes and Challenges of Our Program (cont'd)

What have you learned from adding a service-learning component to your course?

- It's possible to do and everyone benefits from it
- How to tie theory to practice
- The value of experiential education
- Not all students are ready for service-learning that requires independent work
- More about community needs
- Uncomfortable about giving up any class time for students to go to sites

Successes and Challenges of Our Program (cont'd)

How are your students benefiting?

- Students gain deeper understanding of academic materials
- Students gain a better understanding of Chester and the real world
- Students gain insights regarding career options
- Students become better in oral and communication skills

Successes and Challenges of Our Program (cont'd)

How does the quality of learning with the service-learning component compare to traditional classroom learning?

- Students gain a deeper understanding of material
- Stimulates students; more engaging than regular classroom learning
- Relevance to their own professional and personal development

Successes and Challenges of Our Program (cont'd)

What has the service-learning option replaced if anything in your course?

What would you change to improve the overall service-learning experience for you, your students, and your community partner(s)?

What services could the university provide that would help your service-learning course to be more successful?

Student Assessment*

- Student Pre-Survey
- Student Post-Survey (Service-Learning)
- Student Post-Survey (Non-Service-Learning) - used for students who did not do optional S-L component

*Developed by Diaz, Furco & Yamada, University of California at Berkeley, 1999.

(<http://gse.berkeley.edu/research/slc/evaluation.html>)

Questions and Answers

To contact us:

Arlene Dowshen (610)499-1245
aldowshen@widener.edu

Stuart Eimer (610-499-4640)
speimer@widener.edu

Marcine Pickron-Davis (610)499-4566
mcpickron-davis@widener.edu