



Educating engaged citizens through service: Innovative models for reflection and dialogue

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Summary

Community service, accompanied by regular, guided reflection, provides a highly effective tool for engaging students in democratic practices within their communities (Astin, 1998; Kolb, 1984; Kuh, 1995). Community service programs must include components that develop greater identification with the community, promote civil dialogue and critical thought, and teach communication skills. Reflection practices can teach students about a range of social issues and also deepen their understanding of the common good. Engagement in the community through service provides an ideal vehicle for sparking conversation about previously unexamined concepts of self in relation to society and the notion of a common good that weaves through the tapestry of society.

After a yearlong process that included a literature review, examination of models implemented at other universities, and self-evaluation of education and reflection practices, staff from the Center for Community Service and Justice developed an innovative model designed to raise the quality of and participation in structured reflection sessions proceeding and following co-curricular community service experiences. The new model is structured around three key components --Commitment, Training, and Curriculum --that address both the weaknesses of the previous model and further the goals of experiential education. To assess the effectiveness of the new model in accomplishing the goals for reflection, qualitative and quantitative data have been collected and evaluated for both student participants and student leaders.

During this team inquiry presentation, we will provide opportunity for discussion and interaction among participants as well as time for participation in a structured reflection experience. Presenters will discuss the development of the comprehensive model for building structured reflection into a university-level community service program (including literature review and theoretical framework) and include evaluation data assessing the model's impact. Data from more unstructured older program models will be compared to more recent data. Student co-facilitators will lead participants in a mock reflection session, offering their own commentary and discussing their own learning as facilitators throughout the process. Then, participants will strategize about ways to enhance those opportunities on their home campuses. Finally, a community partner co-presenter will offer commentary on their own experience with student volunteers and their role as a co-educator.

References

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