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Public service can be made more attractive and more productive both individually and institutionally by introducing a "value" concept to each project or task, showing that it is a productive and worthwhile opportunity rather than an act of charity and a drain on resources. The author discusses ways of evaluating the worth of a public service activity to the community, to the state, to the profession, to the institution, and to faculty members, and shows how the concept can be institutionalized.

Putting Value into Public Service

Urban universities have a good chance of leading in the decades to come if we can come to grips with our public service missions. Already urban public universities have many characteristics of the universities of the future. We have diverse student bodies. We serve students who attend from early morning to late at night. We have faculty members who know how to teach. Our research is relevant. We often meet the business and research needs of the urban regions in which we are located. For these reasons, our urban universities will be highly relevant for the next century.

Planning schools in these institutions have many roles to play. One area with increasing expectations is that of public service. But there are few incentives for faculty members to engage in public service. In response, this paper introduces a "value" concept that increases the attractiveness of service activities by establishing an incentive system. The model's success lies in the ability of administrators to structure service projects for the mutual benefit of faculty, the university, and, ultimately, the public.

The Nature of Public Service

Public service has long been called an integral part of the university mission, particularly in public institutions. But certain inherent problems may mean that it is given little more than lip service in some institutions. If faculty members are to engage in public service at a meaningful level, then incentives must be developed to encourage and reward this dimension of university life.

Although service can be defined in a number of ways, it traditionally involves departments or university units offering their skills and knowledge in professional or community related endeavors, usually at the local or regional level. The importance of public service may be stressed institutionally; it is usually incorporated into university mission statements. In some institutions, special funds may

even be provided for extension or service projects that are provided by "extension" faculty or staff.At most institutions, however, the bulk of service is delivered by individual faculty members, on an almost informal basis, within academic departments. In this setting, the tripartite goals of teaching, research, and public service are usually codified as the determinants of academic success. Contract renewal and ultimately tenure depend upon adequate performance in these areas, which are used as criteria to judge individual achievement at the departmental and campus levels.

The Relative Worth of Public Service

Although institutions acknowledge the importance of service along with teaching and research, the relative worth of the three might be questioned. In many institutions, research has risen to greater prominence than teaching as a measure of academic performance, with service falling into a distant third place. It is probable that a poor teacher or researcher with an excellent service record will have difficulty surviving in most colleges or universities, while an excellent researcher with no service activity has a much better chance of survival.

The value of undertaking public service is therefore qualified by the perceived worth of doing such work, as well as by the time, energy, and resources available to both institutions and individuals. This factor is exacerbated by financial exigencies and by promotion standards that cause faculty members to make certain choices in the ways they build their curriculum vitae. In this light, public service comes to be viewed as an unnecessary appendage to the other, more relevant, criteria -- a drain on resources, an unattractive choice for faculty members, and an unaffordable luxury for administrators.

How, therefore, can service be redefined to reestablish it as an important part of the academic mission? One possibility may be a model of service that introduces a **value concept** and integrates service firmly with the other prime criteria of teaching and research. This approach calls for making service a more attractive and, ultimately, more productive endeavor both individually and institutionally.

The "Value" Concept

The model introduces a "value" concept to each project or task, calling for an explicit evaluation of its worth to the community, to the state, to the profession, to the institution, and to faculty members. Some projects, for example, should be undertaken almost automatically if sufficient resources are available. Service on task forces and consultations to community groups may be ways to carry out the service mission by helping deserving groups who have few alternatives to essentially free assistance.

Beyond these functions, institutions can be more selective. Does it violate a basic principle of public service to ask (albeit quietly) "What's in it for us?" when a university is approached by corporations, city or county departments, or private entrepreneurs -- in short, by organizations with financial capability looking for some useful ideas or assistance?

What's in public service for us can include a wide range of much that, in addition to undertaking the task successfully, can benefit the institution and the individual. These benefits can range from scholarly enrichment to financial gain. Is it possible to link financial gain with what is usually conceived of as a charitable act? This depends upon the ability and willingness of a party to pay, but more specifically, upon the skill of the faculty member or administrator to negotiate a **fair** arrangement.

The Question of Fairness

What is fair involves numerous dimensions. Since the faculty and students involved in the public service are, in fact, providing a service or product, they should be rewarded for their efforts, in terms of course credit, recognition, or compensation. The client also must receive value for the fee paid and time contributed to the undertaking. And the institution must receive a benefit, which might be measured as educational enhancement to students, real world opportunities for faculty members, or financial gain.

In addition, there is at least one other group that must be treated fairly -- the professionals who normally provide such services for a fee. Public service projects should not be seen as taking work away from private sector consultants and firms. This is to say that if the service being sought is one typically provided by the private sector, and the client has the ability to pay, then the private sector should provide the service. But the situation is not always so clear. Moreover, universities can provide services that are unique, politically difficult for the private sector, or experimental.

The ability to pay, however, is a two-edged sword. I believe that public service projects rarely should be provided free of charge. Clients more readily recognize value when they pay a fee, and there is a clear contractual agreement about the service. Moreover, charging a fee, even a modest one, helps universities avoid giving away professional services.

Payment for public service projects can take various forms. It might involve contracts that provide summer pay for faculty and students or release time for faculty during the academic year. The fees for service could be quite modest and be framed in the form of competition prizes for student projects or funds to produce posters, exhibitions, or printed booklets to display the completed work. Such products ensure maximum publicity for the institution's involvement and can become useful tools in the expansion of further service activity. These products can even be useful in developing political support. Such support can take the form of generating credibility within the university where it is important for departments and colleges to convey to their deans and vice presidents the quality and usefulness of their public service.

It is also important to provide useful information about the value of public service to professional institutes, accrediting agencies, city governments, university system administrations, and state legislatures which may wield influence or decision-making power over the home institution. In summary, this model of service works on the premise that while the act of doing may be laudable, the expenditure of precious resources -- time, energy, and funds -- is not fully maximized unless that effort is properly communicated to the affected and involved parties.

Of course, beyond the harsh realities of finance and influence lie the day-to-day realities of academic achievement for the individual faculty member. As previously stated, the relatively low esteem in which public service is held in most institutions makes the expenditure of effort in this direction potentially dangerous. This is where the notion of "piggybacking" comes in.

Piggybacking

If projects are critically evaluated when they arise, the concept of "value" -- in this case value to the individual -- can be determined and an appropriate strategy for implementation established. For example, can the service project be expanded into a proposal of interest to a local, state, or national funding agency? The benefits in

terms of buyouts, project assistants, publication, and travel costs are well known. Can the completed work form the basis of a scholarly paper, article, or book chapter, or be worked into an exhibition? Can the work be submitted for an appropriate award or similar recognition? Beyond the actual undertaking of a service project lie innumerable opportunities to convert the results into more conventional academic achievements. While this may be old news to experienced faculty members, those new to the profession may miss such useful opportunities.

The notion of public service can even be introduced at the teaching level, giving students the chance to work on real projects with active client groups, instead of dealing solely with textbook cases and simulations. Again, serious questions should be asked before the work is accepted. Does the project satisfy not only the needs of the client but the pedagogical requirements of the course? What kinds of benefits beyond the experience -- prizes, project assistantships, travel -- should the student reasonably expect? Can the results of the student work be published or exhibited? Can the results even be implemented, giving terrific real world experience to the students and high visibility to the institution?

Institutionalizing the Concept

If this model of public service is considered an appropriate one -- and it may not fit within the structure and mission of some colleges or universities -- how best can it be introduced or expanded within the institution? Although it may be handled individually by faculty members, the model will be most effective if organized collectively at the department or unit level.

It requires administrators to be able to negotiate effectively and diplomatically with likely "client" groups. It requires effectively advising the faculty, particularly junior members, of the potential advantages of "piggybacking." It also requires an institutional mechanism for receiving and accounting for client funds, and an agreement that such funds generated by a unit can be used by that unit in a flexible manner. Above all, it requires a balanced view of public service projects and tasks, a collective assessment of the departmental output with regard to service, and an evaluation of the overall benefits, both institutional and individual, that can be expected from public service projects.

If viewed in a value-added context, public service can be a productive and worthwhile opportunity rather than a drain on resources. If more closely integrated with teaching and research, public service can lose its negative charity-like status. Its role can thus be expanded significantly to the positive benefit of both institution and society, enabling us to fulfill one of the stated missions of our universities more effectively.

Note: This article is based on an address to the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning in Philadelphia on October 30, 1993.