Planning and Assessing to Improve Campus – Community Engagement

By Robert G. Bringle, Julie Hatcher,
Sharon Hamilton, and Peter Young

Abstract

Two methods for assessing the scholarship of engagement at the institutional level are presented: (a) the Comprehensive Assessment of the Scholarship of Engagement (CASE), a systematic method that compiles information about service learning and community engagement, identifies campus strengths, and prioritizes planning areas, and (b) an institutional portfolio that provides a rich data base of descriptive and evaluative information.

The manifestations of community engagement by American higher education include: (*a*) cooperative extension and continuing education programs, (*b*) clinical and pre-professional programs, (*c*) top-down administrative initiatives, (*d*) centralized adminis-trative-academic units with outreach missions, (*e*) faculty professional service, (*f*) student volunteer initiatives, (*g*) economic and political outreach, (*h*) community access to facilities and cultural events, and most recently, (*i*) service learning classes (Thomas 1998). Unfortunately, however, there have been too many instances of the academy treating communities as "pockets of needs, laboratories for experimentation, or passive recipients of expertise" (Bringle, Games, & Malloy 1999). In response to a record of uneven successes with community involvement, Boyer (1996) challenged higher education to bring new dignity to the scholarship of engagement by connecting its rich resources "to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems, to our children, to our schools, to our teachers, to our cities" (Boyer 1996). To meet this challenge, campuses are critically examining their practices of engagement, exploring new means for developing civic responsibility as an aligned component of campus mission, and devoting resources to partnerships that redefine the role of civic activities in academic life and academic activities in civic life (Boyte & Hollander 1999; Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett 2000; Bringle et al. 1999).

The number of successful campus-community projects is an important indicator of civic engagement. However, more important for sustaining enduring relationships is identifying performance indicators that reflect (*a*) the quality of the campus-community partnerships, and (*b*) the outcomes and transformations that occur on campus and in communities. Quality and outcomes can best be measured through structured assess-ment activities that generate and use "information about performance so that it is fed

back into the system from which it comes to improve that system" (Cambridge 1999). Two structured assessment methods will be presented that assess past activities and inform future work. The first is the Comprehensive Assessment of the Scholarship of Engagement. The second is the Urban Universities Portfolio Project.

Service Learning

One of the most dramatic changes in higher education during the 1990s is the proliferation of service learning classes. Service learning is defined as a "course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (*a*) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs, and (*b*) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility" (Bringle & Hatcher 1995). Successful service learning classes establish reciprocal relationships between the campus and community, with each party giving and benefiting. Accordingly, the service activities must be selected so that they are relevant to both the (*a*) educational goals of the course and (*b*) the needs and issues of communities. As Zlotkowski (1999) noted, "A difference between service learning courses and other community-related campus-based initiatives lies in its insistence that the needs to be met <u>must</u> be defined by the community, not the campus. In other words, service learning deliberately seeks to reverse the long-established academic practice of <u>using</u> the community for the academy's own ends" (p. 98).

Service Learning and Civic Engagement

Given all of the ways in which a campus can interact with a community (*see* Thomas 1998), the task of an institution identifying performance indicators to assess the quality of the activities, initial outcomes, and long-range outcomes for both the institution and the community is a daunting task. When there are practical limitations on assessing all elements of an entire domain, the most typically elected alternative is to sample the domain in order to measure key components that are representative of overall performance. For example, one could obtain a random sample, a representative sample (e.g., one or several projects from each unit), or a prioritized sample, which acknowledges that certain types of components are more important than others.

We contend that, in the case of civic engagement, service learning constitutes a necessary component of achievement because, when service learning is institutionalized on a campus (i.e., integral, enduring, and meaningful to all stakeholders), it produces transformations of the work of colleges and universities on the broader spectrum of civic engagement (Benson, et al. 2000; Boyte & Hollander 1999; Bringle, et al. 1999; Bringle & Hatcher 1996, 2000; Zlotkowski 1999). Service learning provides a high standard for all civic engagement because its emphasis on dialogue and reciprocity changes the commonly held assumption in the academy that expertise is a campus resource to be distributed, *at its discretion*, to the community. Service learning acknowledges that expertise, knowledge, and wisdom reside outside the academy, and that community persons should play a significant role in educating students and generating knowledge.

Campuses that are low on the institutionalization of service learning, but have an emphasis on other forms of civic engagement (e.g., extension services, student volunteering), run the risk that these community activities are segregated from the core activities of the campus, are conducted by marginalized enclaves of a few individuals (see Singleton, Hirsch, & Burack 1999), and have little impact on the work, activities, and culture of most faculty, staff, and students. In contrast, when service learning is institutionalized, then it is part of the academic culture of the institution, aligns with its mission, becomes an enduring aspect of the curriculum that is supported by more than a few faculty, improves other forms of pedagogy, leads to other forms of civic scholarship, influences faculty roles and rewards, is part of the experience of most students, and has widespread support, understanding, and involvement of students, faculty, administration, and the community (Bringle & Hatcher 1996, 2000; Holland 1997, 1999, 2000; Zlotkowski 1996, 1998, 1999). This leads us to the conclusion that service learning is, thus, a necessary component of effective civic engagement, and if one can not measure and evaluate every aspect of civic engagement, then service learning is the most important critical indicator of a campus's civic engagement.

Comprehensive Assessment of the Scholarship of Engagement (CASE)

The Comprehensive Action Plan for Service Learning (CAPSL) identifies ten tasks (planning, increasing awareness, developing a prototype of good practice, gathering resources, expanding programs, providing recognition, monitoring, evaluating, conducting research, and institutionalization) for four stakeholders (institution, faculty, students, community) (Bringle & Hatcher 1996). CAPSL was introduced as both a planning heuristic that identifies key tasks for implementing service learning at the institutional level and as a means for assessing the developmental status of service learning on a campus. To assess institutionalization of service learning for 179 respondents from a sample of diverse campuses (Bringle & Hatcher 2000), respondents were asked to rate the achievement their institution had made for each of the 40 cells. Institutionalization of service learning across the 40 cells was related to systematic campus-wide planning activities, establishing centralized infrastructure, and locating service learning under the chief academic officer.

The Comprehensive Assessment of the Scholarship of Engagement (CASE), which is an elaboration of CAPSL, is an assessment process that leads a campus through a variety of activities in order to gain a clearer perspective for planning, program development, and strategic planning. CASE (*a*) expands the sources of information by asking a working group to compile a portfolio of supporting information including evidence, artifacts, and surveys of students, faculty, staff, and community partners; (*b*) expands the single rating in a cell by detailing multiple key components within each cell; (*c*) provides the opportunity for a campus to add a wild card—a significant component of civic engagement or service learning that is not listed within a cell; (*d*) extends the scoring rubric by providing more detailed assessment using response

protocols that are comparable across dimensions being assessed; and (*e*) obtains ratings for the campus on the following ten principles of the engaged campus (Bringle et al. 1999):

1. understanding how community engagement is consistent with its mission
2. involving communities in a continuous, authentic, and meaningful manner
3. having learning at the center
4. reflecting a commitment to community engagement in strategic planning, allocating resources, administrative decisions, campus life, faculty roles and rewards, and evaluation
5. developing infrastructure that supports the complex nature of community engagement
6. demonstrating active leadership for community engagement at all levels of the organization
7. supporting interdisciplinary work on community issues
8. demonstrating flexibility, responsiveness, and sensitivity to external constituencies
9. making the scholarship of engagement visible both internally and externally
10. promoting a culture of service

The working group is asked to make assessments of where the campus (*a*) was 1 year ago, (*b*) is currently, (*c*) where it will be in one year, and (*d*) where it will be in five years. For the two prospective ratings, strategic action steps to reach goals in each of the 40 cells. In this way, CASE provides a comprehensive means that considers staff, students, faculty, community partners, and the institution when structuring a critical examination of campus and community resources, needs, impediments, aspirations, and vision.

CASE is more than an assessment process. Completing CASE provides a campus with an opportunity to gain

1. a focused campus discussion about the status of service learning and campus engagement
2. a comprehensive assessment of current community engagement
3. a sense of satisfaction for what has been accomplished
4. an information base about campus resources to support engagement
5. clear benchmarks against which growth can be compared over time
6. information for internal and external reports, fund raising, and grant proposals
7. a culture of evidence for community engagement
8. a report and portfolio that can be shared with internal and external audiences
9. increased campus understanding of the scholarship of engagement and service learning

CASE is appropriate for all campuses, including experienced campuses and those just beginning new initiatives in service learning and civic engagement. Conducting the entire CASE process requires a significant commitment of staff time; however, the results are informative and worthwhile because the CASE process broadens understanding among both the core group and others, prioritizes planning decisions, and raises aspirations. As with any assessment/strategic planning process, generating widespread support, participation, and understanding (including the executive leadership of the campus) increases the likelihood that civic engagement and service learning

will be reflected in subsequent discussions, decisions, and operations.

Urban University Portfolio Project

The Urban Universities Portfolio Project (UUPP) has brought together six leading urban public universities (California State University at Sacramento, Portland State University, University of Illinois – Chicago, Georgia State University, University of Massachusetts – Boston, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis) to develop a new medium for quality assurance in institutions of higher learning: electronic institutional portfolios that demonstrate effectiveness to various groups of stakeholders. Funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and co-sponsored by the American Association of Higher Education, the UUPP has three main emphases: (*a*) to enhance internal and external stakeholders' understanding of the mission of urban public universities; (*b*) to develop a new approach to cultivating ongoing internal improvement; and (*c*) to experiment with new ways of demonstrating and evaluating effectiveness and accountability in the context of mission.

Although urban public universities differ among themselves as much as they differ, as a group, from other types of institutions of higher learning, they are all located in an urban area. Consequently, in contrast to other types of colleges and universities located in metropolitan settings, they draw many of their students from surrounding communities and many of their graduates remain in the local metropolitan and regional communities. Another consequence of their setting and mission is that they form economic, social, legal, cultural, political, and other mutually beneficial partnerships with their communities. More than any other type of campus, urban public institutions are engaged in diverse and profound ways with their surrounding community. However, this level of engagement, with its resultant mutual benefits for both the campus community and the urban community, is not reflected in nationally prominent rating and ranking approaches, which focus on resources and inputs and assume a traditional research-focused paradigm. The urban mission and the extent and impact of community engagement are often poorly understood by such external stakeholders as accreditors, state governments, students, parents, and even, frequently, by the communities involved in specific partnerships. One major purpose of the UUPP is to build greater public awareness of the contributions of urban public universities, and to establish benchmarks in areas such as community engagement that will serve both as catalysts for internal improvement and as evidence for external affirmation.

At the outset of the UUPP, the national leadership team anticipated developing either common categories for establishing benchmarks for comparison among the six urban campuses or a common approach to defining and demonstrating community engagement. However, because of the diversity in relationships between the six urban campuses and their respective communities, and in how these relationships are defined in the respective missions of each campus, neither of these objectives has been realized in the form originally anticipated. Instead, each of the six campuses is developing its own model of civic engagement, in accordance with its own mission and its own relationship with its community. And, in developing these models, each campus is dealing with the same daunting challenge: although many universities are accustomed to defining

and describing civic engagement, community partnerships, service learning, and the whole spectrum of ways in which they are involved with their surrounding communities (see Thomas 1998), very few have systematically developed measurable outcomes in relation to the impact of civic engagement on the quality of campus and community life.

Accordingly, the UUPP offers six different models for documenting and assessing civic engagement. Even though these models are early in their development, each has the capacity to move beyond mere definition and description of activities toward assessing the impact of civic engagement on both the urban community and the campus community in relation to mutually agreed upon goals and outcomes. The public availability of this level of assessment makes UUPP a significant venture. The evolution of these models can be viewed by visiting the UUPP website at http://www.imir.iupui.edu/portfolio.

Although the six campuses involved in the UUPP came to no agreement about characteristics of urban universities and the nature of their engagement with their respective communities, the emergent models were meta-analyzed for common characteristics. The following commonalities were identified:

1. Access and Support. Urban universities provide the citizens of their regions access to the highest levels of educational opportunity. To complement this increased level of access, urban universities offer a wide range of support services to accommodate the diverse needs of traditional-aged campus resident students, commuter students with significant work and family obligations, and local business and industry partners. Potential indicators of effectiveness include affordability, age distribution of students, mode of student entry, number and percentage of students from the local region, and student satisfaction with support services.

2. Student Learning in the Urban Context. Institutions that pursue an urban mission draw on their local environment to provide students with opportunities to learn from practitioners, develop cross-cultural understanding, apply theory to practice, and contribute to the economic, social, and civic well-being of the community, often through off-campus settings and placements. Potential indicators of effectiveness include student participation in experiential learning and service learning opportunities, student learning outcomes, number and quality of practitioner-instructors, student volunteerism and civic engagement during and after college, and the number and percentage of students remaining in the region after graduation.

3. Diversity and Pluralism. Urban public universities are committed to sustaining environments that reflect the diversity of their cities and to providing educational experiences that enhance students' cross-cultural understanding. Potential indicators of effectiveness include the racial/ethnic distribution of students, faculty, and staff relative to the service region and other public state universities, student ratings of the campus climate for diversity, and student learning outcomes related to working with people of different backgrounds and understanding diverse perspectives.

4. Civic Engagement. The civic engagement of public urban universities is more than just a service mission. Through their people and programs, urban universities promote the educational, professional, and cultural development of all citizens of the region. Potential indicators include collaborative projects with community partners, community-based services and facilities, community members on campus and program advisory boards, involvement in P/K-12 educational systems, student and staff involvement in community-based initiatives, and significant regional and national events on campus or in the community that are hosted by the university but open to the public.

5. Urban Relevance of Programs and Scholarship. Urban public universities include the full range of liberal arts disciplines and degrees, but also sponsor interdisciplinary programs and institutes focused on urban issues, and offer professional programs that align closely with the economic and workforce needs of their respective regions. Potential indicators of effectiveness include research centers and institutes devoted to urban issues, number and percentage of degrees conferred in professionally-oriented programs in comparison with other state public universities, classes and programs designed for (and often located in) local business and community sites, and use of campus classes and programs for continuing professional development.

These commonalities, culled from the institutional portfolios developed in the UUPP, form part of a related project, the Urban Universities Statistical Portrait Project, which is designed to show the complexity of civic engagement in the mission and activities of urban institutions of higher learning.

Conclusion

Dewey (1916) provides insights into the importance of engaging diverse groups through association and discourse that promote democratic values. He also noted both the difficulties and the value of merging the academic and the practitioner, the theoretical and the applied, the academy and the community. Boyer (1996) makes a similar point: "I'm convinced that ultimately, the scholarship of engagement . . . means creating a special climate in which the academic and civic cultures communicate more continuously and more creatively with each other, helping to enlarge what anthropologist Clifford Geertz describes as the universe of human discourse and enriching the quality of life for all of us" (p. 20).

Dewey and interpreters of his work (e.g., Kolb 1984; Giles & Eyler 1994; Hatcher 1997) underscore the value of experience and the role of reflection in furthering learning. Assessment is a reflection activity. There are differences between the two approaches that we described and there are differences among other approaches (e.g., Cruz & Giles 2000; Gelmon 2000; Holland 2000). However, independent of the particular method, the implementation of any worthwhile assessment procedure should manifest the attributes of good reflection: (*a*) examine the success of the bridge between the abstract and concrete, the academy and communities, (*b*) be structured, (*c*) occur regularly, (*d*) allow feedback from stakeholders, and (*e*) provide an opportunity for the institution to examine and clarify its values (Bringle & Hatcher 1999; Hatcher &

Bringle 1997).

In the CASE method, service learning has been identified as the core element of successful civic engagement and of its assessment. Service learning's centrality to faculty, staff, students, and the curriculum as well as its high standard of reciprocity in dealing with the community are its strengths. The integration of pervasive service learning is significant because it changes how faculty and students approach learning, how the academy develops partnerships with communities, and engages diverse participants in democratic discourse and association. However significant service learning's contribution is to instruction, greater significance resides in its ability to generate transformations of the academy, from its mission statement to it operations (e.g., purchasing). For example, service learning as a model for civic engagement is most powerful when it brings the strengths of the academic culture (i.e., faculty, staff, students, economic scale, physical resources) to participatory action research that is communal, democratic, and designed to improve communities and generate knowledge (Benson, et al. 2000; Walshok 1999). The nature of this work, then, will exceed the scope of a single course and requires centralized leadership, campus infrastructure, and resources to orchestrate interdisciplinary approaches focused on key social issues (Benson et al. 2000; Zlotkowski 1998, 1999).

Thus, service learning is best viewed as only a stepping-stone in the development of the civic agenda, albeit an integral step, that challenges higher education to critically examine its role in society through sustained discourse with communities. This is a significant challenge for higher education for, as Benson and his colleagues note, this journey requires changes that have traditionally resided outside the comfort zone of higher education:" To begin with, higher eds [sic] will be required to recognize that they are a major part of the problem as they currently function, not a significant part of the solution. To become part of the solution, higher eds [sic] must give full-hearted, full-minded devotion to the hard task of transforming themselves to becoming socially responsible, civic universities. To do that well, they will have to change their institutional cultures and develop a comprehensive, realistic strategy" (Benson et al. 2000, p. 29).

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Author Information

Robert G. Bringle, Ph.D. (Psychology) is Professor of Psychology and Philanthropic Studies and Director of the Center for Service and Learning at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. His interests include developing ways to institutionalize service learning and civic engagement, and conducting research on student and faculty attitudes, educational outcomes, and institutionalizing service learning. Dr. Bringle is editor of *With Service in Mind: Concepts and Models for Service-Learning in Psychology* (with D. Duffy), and *Colleges and Universities as Citizens* (with R. Games & E. Malloy). He received the Ehrlich Faculty Award for Service Learning.

Robert G. Bringle, Ph.D.
IUPUI Center for Service and Learning
815 West Michigan Street, UC 3114
Indianapolis, IN 46202
Telephone: 317-274-6753
Fax: 317-274-6756
E-mail: rbringle@iupui.edu

Julie A. Hatcher, M.S. (Education), is Associate Director of the Center for Service and Learning and an Adjunct Instructor in Philanthropic Studies at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. Ms. Hatcher teaches a Community Service Seminar, offered by Philanthropic Studies in the School of Liberal Arts. Her research interests include the institutionalization of service learning in higher education, the use of reflection activities in service learning, the implications of John Dewey's philosophy for undergraduate education, service learning course design for freshmen, and workshop guides and resources on service learning for faculty.

Julie Hatcher
IUPUI Center for Service and Learning
815 West Michigan Street, UC 3118
Indianapolis, IN 46202
Telephone: 317-278-2370
Fax: 317-278-7683
E-mail: jhatcher@iupui.edu

Sharon Hamilton, Ph.D. (English) is Professor of English and Director of Campus Writing at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. She is campus director of the Urban Universities Portfolio Project and Co-Director of the Indiana University Faculty Colloquium for Excellence in Teaching. Dr. Hamilton's scholarly interests include teaching and learning collaboratively, writing across the curriculum, and international literacy concerns. For her extraordinary work, she received the distinction of Chancellor's Professor at IUPUI.

Sharon Hamilton
Department of English, UC 3131
425 University Blvd.
Indianapolis, IN 46202
Telephone: 317-278-1846
Fax: 317-278-1287
E-mail: shamilto@iupui.edu

Peter Young, M.A. (Higher Education Administration) is Executive Director of Indiana Campus Compact. He served as Assistant Director for Leadership and Service Programs at Ball State University and he is currently completing a J.D. degree. Mr. Young's interests include developing programs in higher education that promote an ethic of service and develop skills for active citizenship.

Peter Young
Indiana Campus Compact
850 West Michigan Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202
Telephone: 317-274-6500
Fax: 317-274-6510
E-mail: pjyoung@iupui.edu