



University of Nebraska Omaha
DigitalCommons@UNO

Higher Education

Service Learning

1989

The National Agenda

Paul A. Elsner

Maricopa Community College

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/slcehighered>

 Part of the [Service Learning Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Elsner, Paul A., "The National Agenda" (1989). *Higher Education*. Paper 28.
<http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/slcehighered/28>

This Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the Service Learning at DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Higher Education by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.



V1-30-99

**THE PARTNERSHIP FOR SERVICE-LEARNING
6TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

February 24-26, 1989: Maricopa Community Colleges, Phoenix, Arizona

UNITING SERVICE AND LEARNING

.....

The National Agenda

Paul A. Elsner
Chancellor
Maricopa Community College District

.....

I am afraid that my comments about the national agenda have been somewhat co-opted by Bob Atwell's observations of yesterday.

I would be remiss if I did not express my appreciation to The Partnership for Service-Learning for bringing so many rich experiences to our Maricopa community. You have given us new insights about volunteerism, social responsibility, service-learning, and the rich connection between service-learning and the academic core of our colleges. There has been a sorting out of the ideological and philosophical premises of service-learning for a very long time. Maricopa is very much indebted for the kinds of insights, the kinds of experiences that you bring to this important topic.

I have to think about service-learning as a practitioner would. I was very impressed with the students yesterday. I picked up a terminology at this conference that describes a powerful pedagogy. I was impressed with Mr. Goodlad's comments about bridging the real world with the theoretical world. Disciplines can come alive upon

having a practical service-learning experience.

We are very honored to have Mora Dickson and Alec Dickson with us. They give us a framework about service-learning beyond anything that we, as practitioners, could develop over a decade or several decades. I especially appreciate the groundwork that Dr. Bill Berry, Dr. de los Santos, Margaret Gwynne and others have brought to this particular conference. I am going to speak from the perspective of a practitioner. To do this, I will go back to sort out the ideological struggle that this particular segment, community colleges, has been going through for several years.

Recently, I began working with a group called the Futures Forum. This group has been looking at the world in a different way. With the help of a consulting firm called Hardaway Connections and several in the City of Phoenix's Futures Forum, we tried to draw four plausible scenarios for the future. We tried to put those into vignette form. As visitors, you have not seen much of Phoenix, other than the walls of the hotel.

This group took what we thought were logical communities in four different scenarios. We worked through what Phoenix might be like using Charles Dickens' analogy. Hardaway Connections wrote some scenarios and called it A Tale of Four Cities.

The first city was called "A City That Continues The Present Road" - the road of progress I suppose.

But...the year is 2010, Val Trans and Rio Salado have both failed, the air is brown, the traffic congested, education mediocre. The zoning has been ineffective and the cities throughout the Valley fight each other for new companies and projects, the unions are weak, the service sector continues to grow, entrepreneurship stagnates in a morass of legal restrictions and lack of funding sources, no new human service programs exist, and the school districts are a mystifying proliferation. The level of human services leaves single parent families and latch-key children without support systems and

suicide rates grow higher as does the use of drugs. Instead of farmers, the city spawns lawyers. The citizens are apathetic. Philanthropy has not increased, the population remains transient and rootless, people arrive, realize that the reasons they came are no longer here and leave. The great outdoors, for which most of us came to Phoenix, is so crowded that people do not go there anymore. The tourist industry is healthy in the suburbs in Tucson, but not in Phoenix. The patterns of urban sprawl continue, leaving a stagnant downtown and deteriorating neighborhoods. Anyone who can afford it, lives in a house in a walled community. Most people cannot afford adequate housing. Some people succeed, but it is hit-or-miss or worse. The summers are hotter, but the winters are mild and taxes are still low. The airport is good and our land costs continue to rise. People still feel small businesses have a good chance here; however, they go in and out of business on a daily basis. The arts groups struggle to survive because the citizens have no real commitment to the society. The desert has largely been replaced by pavement and urban areas are locked in waterways with rural communities from which they must buy water. To some extent, technology is a mitigating factor, but it also divides those who have access to it from those who do not. It is a cost burden on the public sector. In the metropolitan area, the decline of education and human services leads to a stepping down of skill levels and jobs. Most people who live in the city work in service occupations for low wages without career paths.

Now the second city is called "A Place in the Sun." This city follows the path to conformity with the desert (which some of you had a chance to look at very briefly last night).

Design guidelines are strict. In the last 20 years, we have identified all the amenities which have had to do with the sun and made them part of Phoenix's lifestyle: foliage, overhangs, and protective spaces. Even our high rises do not cause heat reflection. We have mandated the aesthetic elements that we can use and the society is based on conservation and preservation. We are distinctive. There is a higher value on bikes and other non-auto transportation. Electric powered vehicles proliferate. New and creative solutions have been found for environmental and resource problems. We are more of a year-round community that integrates the indoor and outdoor lifestyle with respect to the environment. Shade, shadow, plant materials and design are forces of nature which are at work harmoniously. Public transportation is a part of this but all has its price. We may limit the capacity of Phoenix. This is a community where choices are restricted. There are no swimming pools, and it costs big money to bring the shade and shadow culture to Phoenix. There are no fireplaces

or barbecues. The air is cleaner because of an enormous educational campaign. We live in denser nodes. We do not drive as much and when we do, we use oxygenated fuels. Driving an automobile costs more, a lot more. There is a 50 cents a gallon tax on gas. We park underground. Naturally, there is no heavy manufacturing because it is dirty. Water is used sparingly and meaningfully. This is a more structured society because of its emphasis on living with the environment. After initial high expenses, this is a society with lower costs for waste management and environmental clean up. Styrofoam is prohibited. Hooray! The tourists really like it because the desert experience is unique. This is a healthy climate for small entrepreneurial businesses, and it is good for those businesses that produce appropriate technologies. Some employers do not come here because of lifestyle restrictions. We spend more time outside because our walkways are shaded, and we understand how to manage the heat. We limit the capacity of Phoenix. We lose some personal freedoms for the freedom to breathe clean air. We do not appeal to everyone.

The third city is called "Entrepreneurial City." Its motto is: There is no business like business.

The emphasis is on technology and economic development. Public funding is used to propel business at every scale. Phoenix has become a world economic center with a multi-faceted approach to economic growth and a large commitment to research and development. The pace-setting faculty at the university communicates with the students at computer terminals through computer terminology. All over town education is focused on business technology and entrepreneurship. Profit is a high value. Business motivations control the regulatory environment, and employment and population continue to grow. The entire society is oriented toward problem solving in all facets of society. The average citizen is driven and task oriented with few social interactions. Living in the cosmopolitan stratified Hong Kong of the southwest, which looks like a big suburb of Los Angeles, youth is alienated. Streets are tough. Anything goes. Culture and human services struggle. Large corporations make contributions to selected activities and take care of their own. The city is known for its excellent restaurants, cellular phones, nightclubs, congestion and sprawl. It costs more to clean up hazardous waste and there is little interest in conservation. The pressure of public opinion, however, still makes conflict between environmentalists who want cleaner air and an end to the ground water pollution and profit motive. Short term environmental fixes ignore long-term problems. Since time is a premium, technology is applied to deliver many of our services. Most training is technical and the liberal arts suffer. Daycare is provided by corporations, but the elderly receive no care, and cost public services have been taken over by the private sector

whenever there is a profit to be made. If someone is out of a job, he or she goes into business for himself. Business is in. Government is out.

The fourth city, and last, might be where we come in. This is a city of the people. Its matrix is children, and if it is good for the children, it is good for everyone. In some ways it was copied after some of the things the city of Seattle has done where the steps on the buses are lower, the graphics are very large, and the playgrounds and walkways are safe.

But...all decisions are made on the basis of sensitivity to other people's needs. Caring and sharing are the by-words. The welfare of the individual is the prime motivating factor. The ideal of the society [this city] is to maximize the human potential; the emphasis on people mixing rather than on anonymity. There is art in public places and affordable housing. Design controls emphasize people-scale amenity. Government is participatory and great faith is placed upon people's recommendations. Parks and pedestrian environments are everywhere. People accept responsibility, are entrepreneurial and have respect for diversity. Planning processes draw upon children's input. What is good for our children is on a matrix with all other considerations. We worry about our economic base. The quality of life is an article of faith. Everyone hopes it will sustain us economically. Some doubt it. The people issues drive plans and policies here. Education and human services are costly and taxes are high. Substantial resources are allocated to public safety. There is less money culture, major infrastructure, and environmental improvements. Discretionary income is less, and the costs of doing business are high. Recreational development has blossomed, and people have options for transportation. There is a great deal of focus on neighborhoods and preservation with recreational amenities and activity centers. Technology is used only if it serves people and fosters creativity. The society does not restrict access of minorities to technology, but uses technology to arrive at participatory government. The education system is totally changed. This educational reform is driven by a thriving and entrepreneurial group of educational businesses exporting computer and basic education systems and services to the rest of the world. We have become the world model for human capital development through education. Citizenship overcomes consumption. Education comes to the people. Centers of information have shifted and schools are run for the convenience of students, mostly. The voucher system is used. Everyone has adequate food, clothing and shelter. Health care is affordable and community life accommodates all age groups. There is a great commitment to philanthropy and highly perceived quality of life, even though people pay very high taxes. Everyone wants to live

here.

Well, I will stop on those four scenarios for a moment and then I will go back again to the philosophical and ideological struggles that this community college movement, which came into existence, probably in the postwar era more than any other period, but certainly since the '60s and '70s, faces.

At one time, community colleges opened up a community college every week. One year we opened over fifty community colleges. My perceptions of what a national agenda might look like now that the community college movement has reached full maturity, would include a greater sense of social responsibility, perhaps modeled after service-learning.

These volunteer elements are probably going to be central to the ideological premises that I lay forward in thinking about the future of this movement.

The question for me as a practitioner is how can service-learning be integrated into the community college experience? At Maricopa, you have to think of us as 86,000 students, nine campuses, and a massive force, at least potentially, in this community. I believe I know how service-learning can work with private institutions. I believe I know that service-learning is probably the critical and important part of residential colleges. I have not sorted out in my own mind how that will work for community colleges.

I was thrilled to see Brookdale Community College students here. I enjoyed hearing what they had to say, and how their students were integrated into service-learning. But, I think such integration will be a challenge for our segment.

The problems that we face in the community college are that 80 percent of our students work, 50 percent full-time. Those that are with us are incredibly fragile in terms

of their economic well-being. Moreover, it is very difficult for our students to maintain a block of study. We worked with support from the Pugh Memorial Trust in looking at the lower division. Maricopa was chosen as a community college to work with Hampshire College, Carnegie-Mellon, Grinnell College, and a number of other institutions around the country to examine the general education or common learning requirements.

The challenge that immediately came to us was how to get students to even consider a block of study, much less some kind of formal experiences that would have bearing on their developmental stages as young adults. Indeed, some of them are already adults, the average age being 29.

How do we get the undergraduate curriculum to have any coherence at all in a time when society is so tumultuous, so clamorous, economically fast breaking, and so pulled in so many different directions? Are we an economic institution primarily responsive to the external community? Or do we take charge of our own destiny as an institution and lay forth the curriculum component for our students based on some rational consideration about what we think students ought to know?

Can we be more prescriptive? It is very hard for us to sort out how prescriptive we should be because as soon as we get overly prescriptive - and we have done that by introducing some interesting capstone courses in the Maricopa Community Colleges; however, the students will go right up to the 57th hour of credit toward an Associate of Arts degree and forgo their last three hours of credit to jump over to the university. Getting an A.A. degree, for some, is secondary to getting on with their education, with minimum trial and inconvenience. Well, if I were to look at what the long view might be, I think service-learning can be central to each of the various segments. I am

concerned about the Nunn Bill in that it precludes the opportunity for institutions to set their own notions of what an undergraduate experience is, and imposes in many ways, a rallying cry or kind of galvanizing metaphor in the Congress for service-learning. Wendell Wilkie, I think it was, said "You can slow down analysis for two decades by a rallying phrase or a rallying cry." Such a quick development by the Congress could upset well thought out concepts of service-learning, such as Campus Compact or your own service-learning institutions.

I marked three major events in my life in the last four years in the community college. The first opportunity I had to sort out the premises of this huge community college movement was working with the Maricopa faculty, during which time I had the opportunity to write a 21st Century morality play. You recall I said that some time ago we had 52 colleges opening a year, or one every week. We once reached a point, even with all of this expansion, of needing to examine what we stood for as a movement.

And so I wrote a 21st Century morality play in which the protagonist of the play, Everyman, died and went to Heaven. At his death, he was commemorating a century-long celebration of all of the community colleges' accomplishments; he died in a massive assembly of community college followers. He was truly the ideologue and the principal spokesperson for this movement. I felt that Everyman had to die because up to now, we were only into an expansion mode, we were not sufficiently introspective enough to see where the movement was heading. We put the play on in Orlando; we were about to perform it in Toronto after it played, and we had it on the road on five of our campuses. The purpose of doing the production was to try to sort out what we were as a segment.

When Everyman dies and goes to Heaven he, of course, objects. He does not feel

that he should be there - he has an unfinished agenda. But what agenda? He shaped his direction and his movement based on what he thought was the response to the community. What he thought was basically the need to grow, to evolve and to expand. When Everyman got to Heaven, he said "I shouldn't be here: I have an unfinished agenda."

Superior Sponsor, who was God, in this case a woman, came up to him and said, "You were a great movement, Everyman - you did everything we thought you should do. You were strikingly effective in everything that you laid forth and laid out and you accomplished a great deal. You democratized higher education. You were a universal force in making opportunity and access open to everyone. We would have sent others back to you if you had stayed longer. You were glorious. You were, indeed, a difficult segment, difficult at birth, and we had to sequester you and hide you in attics of garrets and third stories of high schools until you were accepted."

Everyman says, "I want to go back, and I need to go back, and I must go back because I have an unfinished agenda."

Superior Sponsor further asks what groups and what sources of inspiration inspired him to bring the movement to such glory. Everyman replied that Walt Whitman, Toqueville, Eric Hoffer and others had shaped the movement, but he needed to go back.

"Of course," she says, "You can never go back." She said, "If you had stayed, we would have introduced you to other influences." In this case several allegorical characters such as Introspection, Renewal, etc.

In the second act, Superior Sponsor takes him to these characters and introduces him to them. These characters are Renewal, Introspection, Braggadocio and Class. Everyman rejects Introspection, tries to consummate a relationship with Renewal (a

romantic angle), and then moves on to one of the other characters, in this case, Social Class, who he blames for some of his problems such as not being recognized as a segment. Everyman goes through these rather wrenching notions of what he has experienced and faced in his life. He gives up and is in despair, probably brought on by a commedia dell'arte character named Braggadocio, who confronts his boastfulness and vanity by taunting him with dances and ditties like "we can do everything, everything - ask us, ask us. We can teach everything from macrame to fission, ask us, ask us: its probably in our mission!"

Superior Sponsor then says, "But there is one more person I want you to meet." And who is that? He finally meets a character called Amphibian, who is the ultimate metaphor for Renewal and change (toss a tail, push out a pod, lose a lung, and so on). Amphibian represents the ultimate process of change and renewal.

The Third Act is the Land of Futures or the Land of Agendas, and in those agendas, we portray the agendas as griffons and monsters and great sources of change and great spirits of power. Everyman must tackle all these agendas, and in those agendas, he must face the aging agenda, the technological agenda, the huge demographics agenda, all indomitable challenges. As a finale, Everyman, Renewal and Amphibian are launched off into sort of a galactic world. They ponder what those agendas will be; what fortitude and imagination will be required to face these storms of change and what obstacles will they need to overcome. Can he conquer them?

Well, so much for that. So much for the ideological premises of this movement. We are still left to ponder our past, present and future. The play was intended to assist us in doing just that.

I next served on another commission. This one was the Future of Community

Colleges, sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation. This commission was charged with looking at where we are going as well. We struggled with similar issues, but we did not have The Partnership for Service-Learning sitting at our elbow, nor had Campus Compact been well formalized at that particular time. As a group, we struggled with the notion of building community. There were some healthy debates. Some said that we were living out the throes of a national momentum and that we were not yet able to chart a direction. The next stages that we had to think through required more analysis. Not all of us were ready for that stage. We said that our theme was to "build communities," but none of us knew or rationally thought through a programmatic response about what this really would have meant. The rhetoric was there. The rallying cry was there; but we did not have the pedagogical power of something like service, like this partnership, The Partnership for Service-Learning, to guide us nor did we, even at that time, have Campus Compact at any stage of development.

We participated in a lot of debate. We took a great deal of testimony; we took a lot of statements from the field, including statements from faculty and students. One of the ideas, although developed only marginally in the report, was that of building communities.

Creating community and building community ought to be the national theme of our movement. If we had had the kind of rationality and the kind of experience that is represented in this Partnership, we would have developed this concept in a much more substantive way. I felt, as did others, that "building communities" was a second force in this ideological evolution that we are going through.

Now the third experience I will relate to involves my serving on the Executive Committee of Campus Compact in the very early stages of the formation of this national

coalition. Most of you are familiar with the Compact's goals. Campus Compact has prescribed that some kind of social service, community service, ought to be a part of every undergraduate's experience, if possible. In the beginning, the national response to this idea was very enthusiastic. I would have to say that probably the Sam Nunn initiative is a form of aberration of that excitement.

Campus Compact really was an interesting national experience for me because it indicated to me that we make a lot of assumptions about how the field acts and then we go ask what the field would do - the students in this case. We have an altogether different experience than what was represented. This started out with a debate between some university presidents as to whether students would engage in socially useful, socially responsible activities if they were given the opportunity.

One of the debates centered on the nature of the university. One university president went back to the purposes of the university. He said, as you recall, that Cardinal Newman, in his essays on the purposes of the university, reflected on the academic institution which has primary responsibility for developing intellect. The development of the socially responsible person may have to be left to randomness or choice. The so-called whole person was not the university's responsibility.

I thought to myself, "Well what would be the community college's response to this discussion?"

One of the things that the Freshman Studies Project, carried on by Sandy Austin, bore out was a very clear shift since 20 years ago. There were discernible patterns in student attitudes. Students used to be concerned with finding meaningful philosophy or developing a meaningful philosophy of life. But the pattern has clearly shifted toward central concerns like "getting a job," "getting a profession," and "making good money or

achieving a good standard of living." I believe that may change. We might be in the midst of a paradigm shift.

We have always had a basic optimism that society's basic needs like hunger, housing and health care, would always be supported by the Congress, the states, or the local policy makers.

More recently, we have had governments change when the incoming President, or Governor faces more critical resource problems than any previous administration. Some other arrangement, some other solution must now be formed. Could the students and community volunteer corps be one answer? In addition, would students do volunteer work? Are they not a powerful untapped social force?

The universities largely responsible for promulgating this view at Brown, Georgetown, and other places, counters the notion that students would not really be interested in socially responsible service. Some debated that if given the opportunity, students would be interested in community service. I believe that the overwhelming evidence is that when the students are given a responsibility to participate in socially responsible activities and in community service functions, they, indeed, respond with great enthusiasm; moreover, if they are given the opportunity to design those activities, they even respond more enthusiastically. If they can integrate some form of social service into their own personal development, and can rationalize where they think they are going in terms of curriculum, self, and development of self, they can be powerful players in these community service activities.

Let us go back and look at this segment again. I thought that community service and socially responsible activities such as those at Stanford and Brown, Hampshire College, and others whose presidents were represented on the executive committee were

promoting, were basically programs that were set up primarily for students who have more wealth, more leisure time, and probably better circumstances to manage. At the very least, these students are probably less economically fragile than the community college student.

When Dr. Berry and I brought back from Campus Compact its important message, it fell more or less on deaf ears. I can remember when Dr. Berry and I were talking to various groups. There were maybe only five or six people in the room - soon there were ten, then 20, and we estimate that there are now probably over twenty-five thousand students actively involved in volunteer activities in this last year with something like 28-30 different and substantial programs of one kind or another. However, the problems with our programs, like I think we would find at other colleges, is that our efforts are too episodic. Volunteerism must have the core underpinnings of the kinds of discipline that you have been able to give social activism in the "Partnership." We hope that we can benefit from your experience!

In the community colleges, and certainly at Maricopa, we have a kind of roll-up-your-sleeve pragmatism. We are a response mechanism to many external forces. We are not always in charge of our own destiny in the same way that an independent, private college might be. The responsibilities for our program people here are immense. Our faculty leadership have the challenge to try to move service-learning into a context that is meaningful for 86,000 students, who have jobs, have time pressures, marriages, families and many other competing commitments.

We need to balance this wonderful pragmatism with intelligent programmatic design. We must meld service-learning, community service, and curriculum, in a characteristic "community college" mix. That is going to be difficult. It may be the

foundation for changing the whole fabric of the American community college movement here at Maricopa. It may be the beginning of change for all of higher education if several institutions can come to look across their disciplines, beyond their fundamental missions with a broader vision.

For us, "service-learning" returns us to the community; we will have to struggle with thinking globally and also acting locally. That will be a very difficult process for us.

It will take great leadership on the part of our faculty to propose an international curriculum with service-learning and a community service curriculum that will meet all of these kinds of needs. Maricopa is a tremendous leader in corporate relations. We run programs routinely here for multi-national corporations. Their training agendas are supported by our colleges. Increasingly, their agendas are international. Motorola, for example, directs many employees through our system in a program called Six Sigma. This program now involves cultural understanding, Japanese language study, and other employee transformation programs. Over 15,000 will enroll over the next year. One of the challenges we will have to face is how we match the local needs and the local agenda with the international agenda. I believe the Partnership for Service-Learning can help us. We have recently commissioned a 6 million dollar training center in a community called the Nuestro Barrio Partnership. This is a community (mostly poor, Hispanic) that is taking charge of its destiny in a different way. The Nuestro Barrio Partnership Project is much in the tradition of what I thought building communities really meant. This community has been able to focus on its own community problems and arrive at strategies and solutions for its own community needs. The Nuestro Barrio Partnership is a fragile community. Like other communities such as Guadalupe and

others in our valley, they have come together in a different way to acknowledge some of the external forces that are going to shape the direction of their community. They have gone through a process of bonding neighborhoods, gaining an identity, learning to take charge of their direction, opposing certain external forces like insensitive development and urban renewal. They have begun to make those forces work for them. We do not have a current methodology that allows us to move into that community and carry out the kinds of community action and neighborhood coalition-type programs that they will require. It is our hope that we can forge those kinds of methodologies and come up with those kinds of solutions. Placing a multi-million dollar training center in that community is only a first step.

I cannot engage in the kind of theoretical discussions that have helped bring the Partnership to its maturity. You have demonstrated, in the last two or three days, that we can hopefully come up with the kind of ideological, philosophical base that brings out the assumptions and the premises of a model national program for community service. We have benefited from the rich experiences that you represent here today. I hope that you have received, in turn, something out of our sharing the kinds of struggles and questions that we are going to have to face at Maricopa.

I see at the end of the process, a new union for community service - perhaps a new pedagogy for service-learning. What city will we build? Our place in the sun? A city where people need people? I think I know which ones will match Maricopa's future.

.....

Elsner, Paul A. - Chancellor of the Maricopa County Community College District since November, 1977; Executive Committee and the only community college member of the American Council on Education's (ACE) Business-Higer Education Forum; Executive Committee, Campus Compact.