

# The Value of Community Engagement (Some Ideas for UK Law Schools from the US)



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# Community Engagement

- Graduate Skills
- Types of Community Involvement
- The Importance of Public Service Community Engagement
- Embedding Employability
- The opportunities through community-centred clinic – “The Philadelphia Story”
- “Access to Justice” project

# Graduate Skills

- The graduate skills agenda is arguably more important now than ever for all UK undergraduate students .
  - More graduates
  - Globalisation
  - Law particularly competitive
- CCCU define as those skills involved in academic work:
  - managing your own learning,
  - communication skills
  - working with others,

Emphasis on showing that students can use these skills rather than just demonstrating, for instance, that they can write a good essay

# Types of Community Engagement (Through Clinical Legal Education)

- Clinic provides opportunities for students to learn by doing (active learning), contextualise their learning and encourage student empowerment.
- Socio-legal learning opportunities, internships, work experience, observation and volunteering are all valuable alternatives to traditional teaching approaches.
- North America the ABA suggests that law schools should make pro bono opportunities available to their students

# The Importance of Public Service Community Engagement

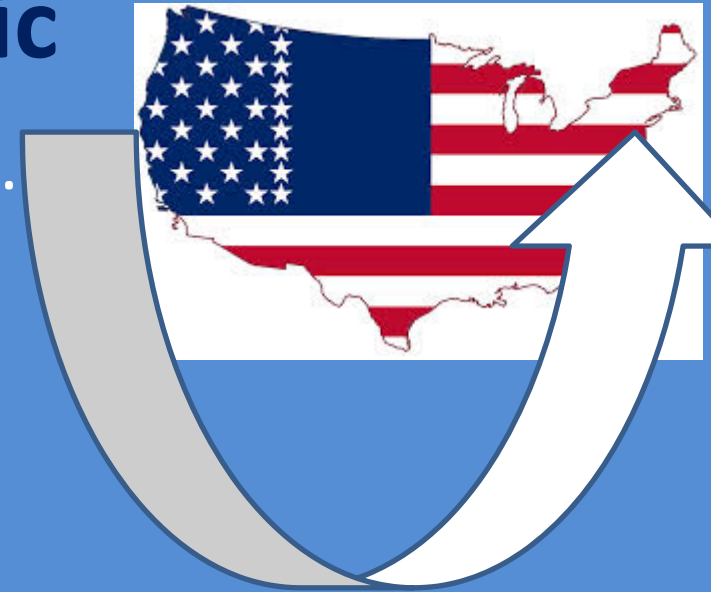
- An inherent sense of philanthropy associated with voluntary work within the community,
- A vital component if some voluntary services are to survive.
- The “Big Society” agenda in the UK

# Embedding Employability (within the curriculum)

- “Employability” - preparing students for the workplace.
- What are employers looking for? Give the evidence here
- Embedding employability within the curriculum - By developing the curriculum to include for credit courses; work-based learning
- What have other UK institutions done?
  - Greenwich (Law and the community)
  - Portsmouth (CAB)
  - Sheffield Hallam (street law programme)

# Opportunities Through Community-Centred Clinic

- Experiences from Philadelphia Pa.
- Philadelphia's Legal landscape
- Penn Law – Gittis Center



# Penn Law School





# The Goat



# The Penn Library Starts in Pa. and ends in NJ.



# William Penn



# The Study

## Methodology

- Qualitative approach
- Participants (sample) from:
  - Mediation Clinic course comprising 2nd and 3rd Year Law students (2L and 3L)
  - Penn alumni who had taken an experiential course inc. the Mediation Clinic
- Questionnaire
  - semi-structured interviews (alumni)
  - focus groups



# The Study

## Analysis and Findings

- Constant comparative method
  - Comparing all the elements such as phrases, sentences, paragraphs with all the other elements.
  - This process enabled comparisons to be made. Coding was then used as an analytical method enabled interpretation of the data gathered for the study.

# The Study

## Emerging Themes

- Skills acquisition/Competencies - Listening Skills,
- Practical exposure – reality, Affective or physiological nature/internalising,
- Challenging learning methodology,
- Better understanding of the subject matter (e.g. conflict),
- Expectations of clinic/experiential engagement and views on experiential learning,
- Ethics

# What They Said

I think [my communication skills] have gotten stronger, you know learning how to communicate information is always a skill you can improve

I learned more from doing than I do from anything else

I think what was unique to this clinic, was conflict management and managing conflict in a constructive way was the biggest skill I've taken out of it so far

It was extremely intense, trying to learn all skills really quickly without really trying them out and then all of a sudden it was like bamm! Now use them.

...the clinic's helpful in that way to force you to think about..... the ethical issues more deeply

# “Access to Justice” Community Project



Law students would (with supervision) provide the following for LiPs:

- Help with paperwork/form filling/sorting and collating papers/interpreting and understanding process and procedure/filing applications;
- Support in hearings (taking notes);
- Moral support/guidance whilst at court;
- Signposting to other advice agencies in the area (where further legal advice need identified).