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A Presidential Perspective

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Service-learning can be viewed as a form of pedagogy designed to enhance learning and promote civic responsibility as well as one of a set of strategies to link the capacity of a college or university to the needs of society. A commitment to service-learning can become the avenue for a larger transformational change agenda by providing a focus and a reason to consider significant changes in campus priorities, faculty roles and rewards, resource utilization and university-community relationships. The case is made for the role of the scholar/practitioner president and the importance of a legitimate scholarly base to effect institutional change, and a set of questions are identified the answers for which would strengthen a president's and an institution's capacity to advance the service-learning agenda

Why are Institutions Interested in Service-Learning?

Service-learning can be viewed as a form of pedagogy designed to enhance learning and promote civic responsibility or it can be seen as one of a set of strategies to link the capacity of a college or university to society. As a president charged with the leadership of a public research university with a land-grant mission, I view service-learning within the larger context of outreach, professional service and engagement. While service-learning is a powerful means to promote learning, it is also a means to accomplish the responsibilities of a university to society. Furthermore, a commitment to service-learning can become the avenue for a larger transformational change agenda by providing a focus and a reason to consider significant changes in campus priorities, faculty roles and rewards, resource utilization and university-community relationships. For this latter reason, I will devote some time talking about transformational change itself.

For many years I have taken the position that any meaningful change in higher education must be based on the same principles and expectations we would apply to any rigorous scholarly work. In other words, *change is a scholarly act among consenting adults*. Given this, I will also make the case for the role of the scholar/practitioner president and the importance of a legitimate scholarly base upon which any change process must be grounded, including the introduction and expansion of service-learning.

In the past several years, the importance of incorporating civic responsibility into both institutional missions and into the curriculum has acquired much higher visibility. It is difficult to keep up with the articles and books on civic responsibility, public scholarship, service-learning, and community-based learning. Many colleges and universities are now experimenting with a variety of approaches to learning communities, service-learning, community-university partnerships, and collaborative research models that bring together students, faculty and community participants to work on issues that will affect the quality of life in communities.

Increasing faculty, staff, and student community involvement that is mission-related makes a great deal of sense. While the goals of these strategies vary and, for the most part, the assumptions behind these approaches are not fully tested, nevertheless the expected outcomes of service-learning and outreach should be of concern to institutions of higher education because they include: (1) the promotion of good citizenship and the renewal of social capital; (2) leadership development; (3) employability of graduates; (4) the enhancement of learning; (5) the solution of complex societal problems; (6) an effective approach to economic and community development; and (7) a means to accomplish a campus mission of service to society (adapted from Ramaley, 1997).

Several years ago, a report based on the experiences of 120 colleges and universities that had participated in the Pew Roundtables organized by The Institute for Research on Higher Education (IRHE, 1996) at the University of Pennsylvania, outlined three dominant themes that initiated and then sustained a drive toward general institutional change:

1. The need to ensure continued financial viabili-

ty and support from external constituencies.

2. The need to focus on the enhancement of the curriculum and pedagogy and on the fostering of successful student learning.

3. The need to establish an institutional culture that is more conducive to change and capable of overcoming barriers to action.

Interestingly, service-learning and outreach activities can contribute to the response to all three of these challenges.

Over the past several years, I have participated in a number of forums that also have reflected upon transformational change. All have focused in one way or another on campus-community relationships, usually in the context of fulfilling the institutional mission. One of the most interesting of these forums, and one especially relevant to public research universities like my own, was the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, which began its work with the goals of revisiting the roots of the land-grant tradition, assessing its contemporary interpretation and looking ahead to a new century.

In its report, "Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution," the Commission defined "engagement" as the redesign of teaching, research and extension and service functions to become more empathetically and productively involved with community concerns and needs (Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land Grant Universities, 1999). Within this model is the principle of mutuality and reciprocity, and the basic assumption that partnerships can benefit all participants. A common thread running throughout the report is the spirit of Justin S. Morrill, the author of the 1862 legislation that established the land-grant movement by directing the proceeds from the sale of public lands toward education as "a means for the creation of an enlightened and virtuous character among the citizens of this country" (Morrill, 1876).

There are a number of interpretations of Justin Morrill's intentions and the forces that led to the acceptance of the first federal grant for education in 1862, the subsequent funding of the Hatch Act in 1872, and the second Morrill Act in 1890. The explanations have included (1) the democratization of higher education; (2) a means of educational reform to move beyond the narrowly defined curriculum of the elite private colleges of the day to a practical education for the working classes; (3) the development of an educational system designed to serve utilitarian ends by supporting research and public service, as well as instruction, addressing the most important national economic issues — at the time, agriculture and mechanical arts; (4) a desire to

emphasize the emerging applied sciences; and, (5) a vehicle to invest in economic development and an important piece of federal economic development policy (summarized in Key, 1996; Williams, 1991). Today, land-grant institutions, through the work of the Kellogg Commission, have revisited the origins of their mission and explored how that historic tradition might be carried forward into a new era. One obvious strategy for doing so is the package of strategies that includes service-learning, university-community partnerships and various forms of community-based scholarship that are explored in this publication.

Another change initiative involving a more diverse group of institutions was the Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation that was begun in 1994 by the American Council on Education with sponsorship from the Kellogg Foundation. In a report based on the experiences of the twenty-six institutions that participated in this project, the authors defined transformational change as "a deep and pervasive type of institutional change that affects the institution as a whole rather than its discrete parts" (Eckel, Hill, Green, & Mallon, 1999). It is clear that institutions that successfully respond to internal and external challenges are distinguished by the intentionality of their efforts and by their ability to learn from their experiences and thus gain new ways to prepare for a successful future.

Finally, in the summer of 1999, a Presidents' Leadership Colloqium, sponsored by Campus Compact and the American Council on Education, generated a Presidents' Fourth of July Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education.[1] This document was based to a significant degree on the Wingspread Declaration on the Civic Responsibilities of Research Universities that was drafted at a Wingspread Conference held in December 1998. In this document, college and university presidents took the position that the challenge of the new millennium is the renewal of our democratic way of life and the reassertion of our social stewardship and civic responsibility.

Service-Learning as a Community-Involvement Strategy: Traversing Swampy Ground

In *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, Donald Schön (1988) writes, " In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground overlooking a swamp. On the hard ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based theory and techniques. In the 'swampy lowlands,' messy, confusing problems defy technical solutions." As a president, I

spend most of my time in the swampy lowlands where problems have many dimensions and clear answers are invariably beyond reach. As a firm believer in the value of engagement as a means to accomplish a mission of discovery, learning and public service, I am seeking to encourage my own institution to embrace strategies that combine academic rigor with meaningful community involvement and consequence. The challenge is to demonstrate that these engaged or community-based approaches actually can accomplish what they are purported to achieve and that they are, therefore, worth the effort to learn how to do.

A number of years ago, a group of community activists in the Portland Metropolitan Area in Oregon developed a simple matrix of three types of real-world problems based on the relative degree of clarity of both the questions posed and the solutions offered[2] that present themselves to policy-makers and community leaders (Ramaley, 2000).

Type 1 problems can be articulated clearly and the solution can be chosen from among one or more already well-researched options or remedies. They represent Schön's high, hard ground. It is common to start students' training with cases of this kind. The expertise of traditional outreach and extension professionals work best with type 1 problems. An example of a type 1 problem is, "what pattern of irrigation will work best on this particular plot of land?"

Type 2 problems can be articulated clearly but the solution or resolution is not readily apparent and there are no well-researched choices to consider. Here the ground is getting slippery, though not yet swampy. These kinds of problems lend themselves well to the attention of graduate students. They also represent the majority of the issues that extension and outreach professionals encounter today. An example of a type 2 problem is, "how can we reduce teenage pregnancy?"

Type 3 problems are confusing and unique "policy messes" for which there is no agreement on either the most important issues nor the most promising remedies. These problems often are made more complex by the conflicting values and perspectives of the various stakeholders. Here we are in the swampy lowlands and in the domain of the scholar-practitioner. A type 3 problem is, "What can we do to enhance the civic involvement of young people?" In a case like this, there is disagreement on the nature of the problem (e.g. what constitutes civic involvement) and/or on the strategies that should be employed to address it.

The Role of the President in Making the Case for Service-Learning

Like the reflective practitioner in Schön's text (1988), I frequently encounter unique cases — type 3 problems — for which no precedent has prepared me. In these situations several significant and sometimes equally important values clash. These cases have far too many variables, most of them, according to Schön, "problematic in several ways at once." Schön calls these issues an "ill-defined melange of topographical, financial, economic, environmental and political factors," that, in my experience, often change shape even as they come into focus. It is to problems like this that I am inclined to apply strategies based on community involvement and public scholarship.

It is becoming clear that an administrator or an academic leader today must not only anticipate type 3 problems but also be a learner among learners. Such a person is willing to embrace the novel and unexpected and is able to be an agent for change. To pave the way for this change in mindset, we presidents must model what it means to engage in reflective practice, to use an experimental approach and then to conduct this work in public. We must constantly study our environment and test various ideas — let us call them *hypotheses* — in the living laboratory over which we preside. It would be wise for us to apply to ourselves the same expectations that we have of any well-educated person whose capacity to think through problems in the swampy lowlands will depend upon attitudes and knowledge as well as skills and experiences to employ a collaborative and rigorous scholarly approach.

Paradoxically, it is the experts themselves, our faculty especially, who have trouble learning. For us to be successful in achieving our missions, we must reflect critically on our own behavior, identify ways in which we have contributed to the success or failure of a project or activity, and then change how we act (Argyris, 1991). When faced with challenges to our established practice or worldview, however, we tend to act defensively and blame some external agent for our discomfort or failure. We do not look within ourselves to find the source of the problem. In the academy, we usually blame the students for not being sufficiently motivated or prepared, or the administration for not being sufficiently able or effective. We do not examine these assertions nor do we insist on seeing the evidence to support them.

Leaders today must model a new way of responding to challenges that face our campuses that is constructive rather than defensive and that holds others to the same high standards. Presidents and other administrators must consistently demonstrate a

devotion to rigorous inquiry that allows for informed decisions to be made within a "culture of evidence"[3] compatible with the scholarly values that are a defining feature of academic institutions. As a scholar, a president must think of each day as a glorious experiment and constantly encourage others at the institution to view every program or case or problem as a learning opportunity, as a vehicle to test basic assumptions about the institution and as a potential avenue for positive institutional change. Only when the presidential role is approached in this manner can the leader be a public learner and properly lead a genuine learning organization (Garvin, 1995; Senge, 1990). At the same time, the call to be a public learner and to model the adoption of a habit of experimentation and the acceptance of the associated risk that accompanies the uncertainty of experimentation can create anxiety for both the leader and his or her associates.

In most organizational environments, the leader is supposed to be in charge, and therefore should be all-knowing and not need to ask questions or show the uncertainty that a scholarly attitude can reveal. According to Napier and Sanaghan (1999), a transformational leader helps others internalize a shared set of values, attitudes and behaviors "that support and champion the moves necessary in organizational change." In a university, the values, attitudes and behaviors that should be modeled and encouraged are those of a rigorous scholar.

The newer integrative models of learning and research bring students directly into the life of a professional community. Here they are exposed to the realities of swampy ground. Some faculty find arrangements like this problematic since they fear that their students will be exposed to average or substandard practice or become discouraged at the complexity of the problems that practitioners face. An academic leader who wishes to provide a substantive argument for service-learning and other forms of community engagement needs substantive "proof" of the value of this pedagogical approach. Even this may not be enough since faculty are often surprisingly resistant to learning about new approaches. In fact, Chris Argyris has shown that professionals often behave defensively when their current practices are questioned (1991). This is made more likely by the fact that service-learning is often used in the context of Type 3 problems, which themselves are messy and difficult to characterize and often viewed as decidedly unscholarly by proponents of the traditional disciplines.

It is uncommon for academic leaders to approach their responsibilities in a scholarly mode. One reason for this is that we do not, as faculty members, usually learn "in public." We prefer to conduct our investigations on our own terms, with conditions set by our own protocols and interests. Then we share our best work with our peers using forms of communication adopted to fit the norms and expectations of our particular discipline. As Napier and Sanaghan (1999) have written, " Most leaders arise within the context of their profession with its clear leadership traditions and particular beliefs." To this insight, I would add that we also learn and then share what we know according to particular rules and norms we have absorbed from our disciplinary perspective.

Another challenge faced by any institutional leader who wishes to view institutional change as a "scholarly act" is that the research base on issues in higher education that might support a scholarly approach to academic leadership is spread across many different fields, built on a variety of different methodologies and reported in a variety of different communication styles and technical vocabularies — qualitative and quantitative, individual observations as well as comparative studies, theoretical and practical. The interdisciplinarity of the research base that might guide good decision-making in a university setting represents a significant barrier to its use. It is difficult for a president to find the relevant studies and reports, validate their contents, and assess the degree to which a particular set of findings might be generalized to their own institution and circumstances.

Creating the Capacity for Change

The strategies necessary to promote and support service-learning and other community involvement are similar to the approach a leader must take to any significant institutional change (Ramaley, 2000). First, it is important for a leader to foster a discipline of reflection and a culture of evidence, insisting that everyone support their opinions and observations with real information, not just perceptions. I frequently ask, "How do you know that?" when faced with a critic who claims to be in possession of the truth.

Second, it is essential to create new patterns of conversation that encourage and support the involvement of everyone in defining the issues that will be important in building the organization. There are many ways to do this. Presently, my own institution is engaged in a Strategic Change Initiative. In the first stage, the senior campus leadership learned new approaches to problem-solving. We also experimented with new ways to involve a broad-based segment of the campus community in defining questions critical to our future, and in identifying and then evaluating strategies that we might employ to address our critical issues, including an interactive web page.

A third component of an experimental or scholarly

mode is to adopt a philosophy of experimentation and the active management of reasonable risks. Several universities have begun to replace the more traditional concepts of risk and risk management with a broader domain of risk bounded by considerations for legal, financial, public relations, and institutional integrity. This new philosophy that actively promotes the management of known risks and a more experimental approach to the generation of campus strategies results in the establishment of some of the features of a learning organization. An experimental mindset must also extend to the introduction of new curricular designs or policies so that the outcomes can be enhanced by a consistent commitment to reflective practice. According to David Garvin (1995), "a learning organization is an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, interpreting and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights." As Peter Senge (1990) has written, "over the long run, superior performance depends on superior learning." Transformational change itself also depends upon superior learning (Eckel, Hill, Green, & Mallon, 1999).

The fourth and final strategy needed to establish a successful learning enterprise is to create new ways to facilitate access to information so that everyone can make informed choices.[4] In many institutions, essential information such as budget details appear mysterious. A number of institutions, including my own, are moving to the use of benchmarking and "dashboard indicators" to measure critically important aspects of institutional performance. These measures are readily available, and often posted on a web site. A similar devotion to good scholarly practice must guide the introduction of strategies like service-learning.

In a college or university undergoing meaningful and intentional change, a leader can serve as the facilitator of a research team and (1) build a shared vision for the future; (2) challenge unexamined assumptions and bring to the surface mental frameworks or models that inappropriately shape everyone's thinking about the issues; (3) foster more connected learning ((Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997) and a consideration of the context of individual decisions and choices; and, (4) model intellectual virtues and adopt a scholarly approach to change (modified from Senge, 1990).

A Research Agenda: What is the Evidence for the Value of Service-Learning?

Having laid upon the shoulders of Presidents and other academic leaders a mantle of scholarship, we are faced with two key questions. First, what body of knowledge might we consult in order to perform the necessary step of "adequate preparation." Second, what can be done to create the scholarly base to support the intellectual and knowledge needs of a learner among learners — a scholar/president?

Over the past several months, I have kept track of the questions that have occurred to me about service-learning, community involvement and university-community partnerships. First, let me describe what I wish any researcher would do for me, regardless of topic.

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of the new programs that we are trying to put in place and assist in creating a base of evidence to support regular review of those programs.

2. Interpret national data and research by relating them to our own institution, pointing out where the national trends fit our situation and where they do not, and why.

3. Sort through the case studies, project reports and monographs that cross my desk in waves, and for those which have application to our institutions, identify the authors' conclusions.

4. Identify people who are doing interesting research on higher education to bring to our campus as consultants/evaluators so as to give us an opportunity to reflect on our mission, our progress and our aspirations.

5. Undertake studies that could help us address our own issues more thoughtfully and with a richer base of knowledge about ourselves, our experience and the relevance of the work of others to our own efforts.

6. Provide technical assistance to units on campus that wish to introduce new pedagogies or activities, conduct studies of performance or assess and address issues specific to that part of the institution.

7. Conduct research that would support the development of new measures of performance to address those elements of our mission that are not commonly assessed, such as the impact of our community involvement and professional service on quality of life in the community.

Now let us turn to the questions I have had in my mind for service-learning itself.

1. Do we have any truly reliable evidence that volunteer service, community involvement, or service-learning experiences actually influence whether an individual will become involved in public life — by voting regularly, serving on commissions and boards, running for elected office, interacting regularly with

public officials, even writing letters to the newspaper editor about issues of concern?

2. Are there valid measures of the impact of service-learning and similar activities not only on what students learn but also what they can do with what they know and how they choose to use their knowledge?

3. How likely is it that participation in service-learning activities will result in a lifelong commitment to involvement in community life and a commitment to social stewardship?

4. Are there other ways, other than service-learning, to increase the likelihood that our graduates will participate in the workings of democracy and care about and pay attention to democratic institutions as well as accept the responsibility to become involved in community life?

5. Do service-learning experiences and other engaged learning activities change a student's ideas about who they are, what they care about, how they want to live their lives, and what they want to do for a living? If so, how and in what directions?

6. Does participation in the design and offering of service-learning experiences have a meaningful influence on faculty scholarly interests and the direction of faculty careers? Do faculty who participate in service-learning turn to aspects of this pedagogy to respond to instructional challenges in traditional kinds of academic courses?

7. What motivates faculty to participate in service-learning or other collaborative and community-based scholarly activities? What evidence can be convincing to faculty who have not participated in service-learning?

8. Do activities of this kind really build institutional support from external constituencies? If so, how can this support be strengthened and sustained?

9. How do the community participants and partners in these activities, either curricular-based or research-based, experience their involvement? What do they value about their participation and what do they hope to accomplish? Do these partnerships actually enhance the capacity of all participants to accomplish their own goals as well as any goals they hold in common? If so, how?

10. What will it take for faculty to perceive this work as truly legitimate, including those for whom service-learning may not be an especially useful educational strategy?

The good news is that this publication begins to articulate a clear research agenda that, carried to completion, will provide a solid base of evidence and a clear theoretical framework with which to argue for the value of service-learning, public scholarship and university-community partnerships. Many of my colleagues remain skeptical about the value of this kind of work. They rightfully demand evidence developed and presented in a way that they can recognize as valid in the light of their own disciplines and conform to the standards of argument and proof with which they are familiar.

Final Note

There is much to be gained from good communication between higher education researchers, program managers, and campus leaders (including faculty and senior administrators). Good contact can keep all three groups honest. An appropriate bridge-builder is the scholar/president, the learner among learners who must slog back and forth between the swampy lowlands and the dry highlands. Over the years, I have learned that a frequent shift of perspective between inductive and deductive reasoning, theory and practice, and formal inquiry and application can enrich any form of scholarship, including the work of the presidential scholar/practitioner. It is also a useful route to making informed choices that have institution-wide consequences.

Notes

[1] Note: The Presidents' Fourth of July Declaration on Civic Responsibility of Higher Education can be found at http://www.compact.org/resources/plcdeclaration.html

[2] As far as I know, the ideas were never published, so I am unable to provide a citation.

[3] This phrase was used regularly by Steve Weiner, then Executive Director of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, to describe the growing importance of assessment and accountability in the design of quality assurance in the institutional review process conducted by regional accrediting bodies.

[4] The four strategies suggested here are based, in part, on a list found on a large piece of newsprint in the St. Johnsbury Extension Office of the University of Vermont. I was told that it first appeared in someone's church bulletin.

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