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Service Learning in a Regional Urban Midwest University: An Overview of Five Projects

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ABSTRACT

The use of service-learning courses has evolved in the United States in the past three decades. While the most traditional approach to service learning focuses on what universities and colleges can do for the community (Speck and Hoppe 2004), a more contemporary approach has transformed service learning into a holistic experience that engages educators, students, and community partners in a dynamic process of mutual exchange. Drawing upon the examples of other universities (Chupp and Joseph 2010; Freire 2004; Pompa 2002), our department has recently created five new opportunities for service learning in which service learning is viewed as a system of interactions and exchanges among all agencies and partners involved. This paper provides an overview of these five projects. Each project employs service learning in a unique way and provides us with the opportunity to reflect on the numerous aspects of learning (in both undergraduate and graduate programs) that are often neglected in traditional classroom courses.

KEY WORDS Service Learning; Experiential Learning; Community Involvement

In the early 1900s, John Dewey advocated for a new philosophy of education that would embrace a more “experiential” approach and allow for the unity of theory and practice (Dewey 1916, 1933, 1938). Although theory inspires our scientific inquiry, it is only in the real field that we can refine our knowledge (Dewey 1938). Today, the idea of experiential learning is embedded in the “service learning” approach to education.

The definition of service learning varies across the different U.S. educational institutions (Furco 1996); however, there seems to be consensus in the literature on education that the purpose of service-learning courses is to provide college and university students with a type of “experiential learning” in which theory marries practice (Butin 2007; Chupp and Joseph 2010; Kendall 1990; Kolb 1984; Morgan and Streb 2001; Roschelle, Turpin, and Elias 2000). The National and Community Service Act of 1990 defines service learning as a method (1) under which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet actual community needs and that are coordinated in collaboration with the school and community; (2) that is integrated into the students’ academic curriculum or provides structured time for a student to think, talk, or write about what the student did and saw during the actual service activity; (3) that provides students with opportunities to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their own communities; and (4) that enhances what is taught in school by extending student learning beyond the classroom and into the community and helps to foster the development of a sense of caring of others (National and Community Service Act 1990:72).

Since the mid-1980s, experts in education across all disciplines have paid much attention to service learning as a new pedagogy. Service-learning courses are currently

adopted in colleges and universities throughout the United States. The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement 2012 estimates that more than 70 percent of students enrolled in academic programs are involved in some form of civic engagement either through volunteering or service-learning activities (Finley 2012). In addition, the latest Campus Connect survey indicates that 95 percent of the colleges in the sample offer service-learning courses, with an average of 66 courses per campus (Campus Connect 2012).

This paper focuses on five projects developed in our department to enhance students' experiential-learning opportunities and to establish a long-term tradition of civic engagement with the communities surrounding our urban campus. Although each project taken separately might not be considered as a real innovation in the academic world, the five projects combined provide our students with the unique opportunity to establish a comprehensive civic-engagement agenda toward the completion of their degrees. Prior to discussing the five projects in depth, we review the modern philosophies of education and contemporary studies on the effect of service learning on students and communities, from which we drew to design our projects.

Service Learning, Reciprocal Learning, and Reflective Learning

In its most traditional approach, service learning was viewed as an opportunity to promote activism, volunteerism, and philanthropy within neighbor communities (Speck and Hoppe 2004). In other words, universities would offer useful resources to their local communities in a sort of unilateral type of engagement but would not be able to acknowledge the advantages that the connections with the communities would bring to the universities (Chupp and Joseph 2010). Because of this unilateral approach, critics of applied pedagogies worried that too often, service learning would take place in unsupervised manners providing students with even more opportunities for developing bias and paternalistic views of the realities of others in the community (Chupp and Joseph 2010).

In 1979, Sigmon emphasized the importance of service learning as “reciprocal-learning” activities in which both the providers of the service and the receivers grow as a result of the experience (Furco 1996; Sigmon 1979). Similarly, Kolb (1984) emphasized the role of service-learning activities as “cycle of experiential learning.” It was not until the mid 1990s, however, that academia began to conceive education—and with it, service learning—as a more holistic type of experience (Jacoby 2003; Reinke 2003; Speck and Hoppe 2004). Furco (1996) argued that it is the reciprocal aspect of the learning activities that distinguishes service learning from all other types of community-engagement activities in higher education (field education, internships, volunteering, etc.).

Of particular inspiration in the development of service-learning education were the recommendations of Freire's “*Pedagogia do Oprimido*”. In Freire's theory, academic education can be successful only if both students and instructors are fully involved in a process that bridges theory with practice in the real field of study where reflections become key to the experience (Freire 2004). Although Freire's theory was published in

English for the first time in 1970, it was not until the mid 1990s that American academic institutions began to embrace Freire's ideals of liberation of education (Freire 1970; Padilla and Montiel 1998). In American institutions, experiential learning (or service learning) developed in juxtaposition to the old-fashioned authoritative approach to education in which instructors dictate what to read and memorize within a traditional classroom setting without any experience in the field (Freire 2004). For Freire, the authoritative teaching approach to academia is the unintentional academic death (Freire 2004). Within Freire's experiential-learning ideal, education is identified as the means for the liberation of the oppressed in that it provides students, instructors, and the community with opportunities for mutual exchange in which everyone has equal access to intellectual development and social growth (Pompa 2002).

The solution is seen in the transformation of the educational structure that allows students to become active participants and not just recipients of information (Freire 2009). The teachers and the students become involved in the same mutual exchange, in which they learn from one another and think critically within the reality of the world outside the classroom (Freire 2009). This transformation is possible only if the students' creativity is valued, respected, and trusted. Students become "critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher" (Freire 2009:170). The student role becomes essential in the process of transformation of the doctrine of education. Students have the opportunity to understand their own orientation in the world because they are "free" to interpret the reality in which they are called to contribute through their social action (Freire 1972). As Macedo (1993) explains, exposure to the complexity of the real world enables students to understand the various aspects of the reality in which they are called upon to make decisions and influence change. Within this pedagogical ideal, service learning becomes the tool necessary to nurture students' sense of community engagement (Morgan and Streb 2001).

The concept of experiential learning is seen as instrumental in the process of strengthening democracies in that it allows young citizens to become aware of the problems of their communities while also giving them the necessary tools to identify the limitations and fallacies of the existing decision-making system (Butin 2007; Morgan and Streb 2001). By developing civic engagement at a young age, students are likely to become more involved, more tolerant (Morgan and Streb 2001), and more aware of issues related to social justice (Butin 2007).

A key element in the success of any form of civic engagement is the students' ability to reflect upon their own experiences. Dewey (1933) discussed the importance of reflection in experiential learning long before service-learning courses became popular in U.S. academic institutions. Drawing upon Dewey's and Freire's education philosophies, contemporary service-learning scholars argue that it is imperative that courses that focus on students' civic engagement also provide opportunities for reflection on their experiences in the community (Chupp and Joseph 2010; Eyler 2002; Eyler, Giles, and Schmiede 1996; Hatcher and Bringle 1997; Moore 1999; Pompa 2002). In the literature, reflection is defined as the "intentional consideration of an experience in light of particular learning objectives" (Hatcher and Bringle 1997:153).

Despite having the opportunity to “visit” the world outside the classroom, without reflective exercises, students would only apply the instructions as given by their teachers, recreating what Freire called the banking model of transferring knowledge (Freire 2009; Macedo 1993). When students are not guided to reflect, they are inclined to only use their specialized knowledge without intimately exploring the many critical aspects of their experiences. Within this framework, students do not have opportunities for critical-thinking and problem-solving exercises because their activities are limited to (1) “storing” information and (2) applying instructions (Freire 2009). Ortega y Gasset (as cited in Macedo 1993) labeled this approach to education as “learned ignoramus” because students become specialized in a miniscule area of the world but ignore the complexity of the reality around them.

In response to the influence of scholars such as Dewey, Kolb, and Freire, our department has recently created a service-learning taskforce and a service-learning/internship coordination center. Following the example of many institutions in North America (and in Indiana), during summer 2012, our service learning/internship taskforce planned five projects, each focused on a different approach to community engagement. We discuss the five projects and provide an overview of the expectations for educators, students, and the community.

Five Projects on Service Learning

Project 1, titled *Building Institutional Capacity and Social Capital through Service Learning*, considers an innovative approach to service learning, in which both the student providers of the service and the recipient organization are the university, specifically the Master of Public Affairs (MPA) program. As discussed in contemporary literature, this project responds to the need of academic curricula that identify students as both action researchers and action learners (Waldner et al. 2011). In this “fusion framework,” students not only learn about social equity but also experience social equity through the service-learning activities (Waldner et al. 2011).

The project takes place within our MPA program that serves primarily midcareer professionals. The MPA is part of a regional urban university located in an economically depressed area. Within this context of explicitly stated values of public service and civic engagement, there seems to be little sense of community among the MPA students. The rhetoric is that midcareer students in an economically depressed area are too busy and face too many social and economic barriers to value a sense of community at the school. In other words, they just want to come to campus, take classes, and return to their families, or so the story goes. The project focuses on a graduate class project designed to challenge that rhetoric. As a part of a graduate class focusing on public organizations, the project focuses on academic topics relevant to public affairs, building institutional capacity and social capital as they relate to the broader study of public organizations, and specifically to organizational culture. Institutional capacity is grounded in B. Guy Peters’s (2012) typology that surveys the history of “Old Institutionalism,” describes the effect of behaviorism and rational-choice theories to social science in general and to these original works of institutional theory more specifically, and then offers a typology of

eight approaches to a “New Institutionalism.” The key concepts highlighted are the process of meaning attribution as an essential element to building public institutional capacity and the reciprocal nature of the relationships among individuals, groups, and institutions. Additional sources of peer-reviewed articles are used to expand and elaborate on this typology. Social capital is taught using Putnam’s (2000) study of social capital to anchor the topic. “Bridging and bonding” and “strong and weak ties” are the key topics highlighted. As with the module on institutional capacity, additional sources of peer-reviewed articles are used to trace the intellectual discourses of this topic. Institutional capacity and social capital are grounded primarily in the review of organizational culture. Key concepts within the study of organizational culture that relate particularly well to institutional capacity and social capital are the ideas of rites and ceremonies, stories and myths, and symbols.

Students work in groups to design a project to build institutional capacity and social capital for the MPA program. The project provides students with the opportunity to apply these abstract theoretical constructs to an actual organization, the MPA program. Students approach the topics of building institutional capacity and social capital as they relate to public organizations from an applied perspective of a public administrator who assumes leadership of a public organization that presents few signs of community. Students are asked to assume that, as a public organizational leader, they want to strengthen the organization’s culture. Students are asked to assess the MPA program for signs and evidence of artifacts of institutional capacity, social capital, and organizational culture. They then consider what organizational design strategies they will consider and why, and to identify the theoretical grounding of their choices. Students implement at least one concrete component of the project and present their projects to the class.

A few examples of the projects include developing and implementing Facebook and LinkedIn pages and starting a Twitter account. Students assessed the current lack of social media use for the department as contributing to the lack of community and social capital and reasoned that more informal opportunities to communicate would build social capital. Groups encountered significant obstacles in working with a large university system with branding, social media policies, and administrative oversight to accounts that they assessed as hindering the potential of building social capital. In this way, they were able to think strategically in a real-world setting about how to operationalize some of the more theoretical concepts they learned in class. The projects gave some much-needed verisimilitude to their learning.

The project combines this theoretical focus with an innovative approach to service learning, in which both the student providers of the service and the recipient organization are the university, specifically the MPA program. In other words, students become simultaneously action researchers and action learners by serving in the dual role of researcher and organizational member undergoing intervention. In the project, students become action researchers, engaging in research that explicitly aims to change the MPA program by building institutional capacity and social capital. Students also participate in action learning by acknowledging the complex and difficult nature of building institutional capacity and social capital in an organization and the uncertainty of the

project's outcome. Students share and reflect upon their previous and current organizational experiences with the problem both individually and as a group, and both as it relates to this specific organization and as a broader leadership concern for other public organizations. By iteratively viewing the problem from the roles of action researcher and action learner, students engage in praxis, the integration of theory and practice. Students experience the reciprocal relationship of theory and practice, in which each continuously informs the other. The broader goal of the project is to equip future practitioners to remain engaged in the empirical research and theory building of public-administration scholarship that is informed by practical action.

In addition to solving a practical problem, the praxis framework provides an opportunity for students to experience several important goals of public leadership. By asking students to address a difficult organizational problem with uncertain outcomes, the project allows students to experience engaged public leadership. The project also provides the opportunity for students to actively participate in the praxis—theory applied to practice that informs theory. By being instituted over several semesters and having several components shared with other classes in the program, the project also affords students the opportunity to experience a learning organization as both organizational designers and organizational members.

While project 1 focuses on service within the same program in which students are recipient of educational services, project 2, discussed next, employs the most traditional approach to service learning by connecting undergraduate students to community partner organizations in which they spend a portion of their credit hours interacting with service providers and victims of domestic violence.

Project 2, titled *Family Violence Service Learning Course*, provides undergraduate students with the opportunity to “offer” service in partnering agencies in addition to completing the required coursework within the traditional classroom setting. There is evidence that students who complete this type of course are more likely to participate in their own communities after completion of their degree (Astin and Sax 1998; Eyler 2002; Freire 2009; Macedo 1993).

Based on the growing interest in issues related to family violence among our students, our faculty created a service-learning course through which students learn about theories on family violence in the classroom and at the same time learn about the consequences of this widespread social problem through interactions with service providers and victims in the community. Within this traditional framework of service learning, the opportunity for reflection becomes a key component of the course curriculum. As contemporary scholars suggest, reflection in service learning is viewed as essential in pedagogies that emphasize the connection between theory and practice (Eyler 2002). Writing assignments are used throughout the course to provide students with an opportunity to reflect on their understanding of the theory, respond to their experience in the community, and link theory with practice.

Teaching undergraduate students about the reality of family violence in a traditional classroom setting can be very challenging. The first barrier that we encounter

as educators refers to the definition of the issue. Terms such as “intimate partner violence,” “domestic violence,” “family violence,” “partner abuse,” and “wife battering” are seldom used interchangeably in the literature. Through service-learning courses, this difficulty can be reduced as students directly learn from service providers (including police officers) the multifaceted reality of this social problem and the reason why multiple terms were coined.

Another difficulty that we encounter when attempting to teach about family violence within the traditional classroom refers to students’ misperception of differences between male and female rates of victimization. Young students often join the course with the myth that women are more aggressive than men in intimate relationships and in the family or that men and women are both equally violent. Although discussing research findings and addressing summary statistics is useful, convincing students that their own experiences count only as anecdotal evidence can be very challenging. Through service learning, students enrolled in family violence courses have the opportunity to understand and interpret the experience of others and to compare it to their own.

A third difficulty that we encounter in teaching about family violence in the traditional classroom setting refers to the trends in perpetration and victimization of intimate partner/family violence. Although reading research findings gives us hope that this social problem is becoming less widespread, national estimates do not provide us with the opportunity to distinguish rates of family violence across all communities. Nationally, rates of intimate partner/family violence have decreased in the past twenty years (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2005), since it was redefined as criminal behavior in 1994 through the Violence Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act (a federal legal umbrella that also includes the VAWA 1994, 1999, 2005, 2013). A glance at local police data, however, indicates that we are far from declaring victory in our war against family violence. In 2011, there were 3,547 intimate partner/family violence calls to the local police department from 2,205 unique addresses (Solinas-Saunders et. al. 2012). With a total of 31,380 households within our urban community (U.S. Census 2010), these figures indicate that rates of family violence in this community are three times as high as those in the U.S. general population (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2005); hence the need for a family violence service-learning course through which students can learn the differences across communities in the United States seems intuitive.

In spring 2012, the first pilot course on family violence was offered to students in our department. In this project, students met in the traditional classroom environment twice per week, for a total of 2.5 hours per week. As part of the service-learning component of the course, students were required to provide service to community agencies for 10–15 hours throughout the semester. Partnership with four women’s shelters and a local sheriff’s department were established at the beginning of the semester. Students had the opportunity to choose at which agency they would offer their service. When working in women’s shelters, students provided direct assistance to clients, assisted administrators with clerical work, responded to crisis calls through the hotline service, or completed janitorial duties as instructed (organizing food pantries, for example). At the local sheriff’s department, students were employed in the completion of

protective orders to assist victims with filling out legal forms. Prior to offering their service, students had to complete a four-hour training session to be best prepared to face the complexity of issues related to family violence victimization. Students were required to complete at least 10 hours of service throughout the semester, but their performance varied with respect to the number of hours of service offered to the partnering agencies. Data from a sample ($n = 12$) of students who completed the pilot study ($N = 20$) show that only two (18.2%) of the 12 students in the sample completed between 10 and 15 hours. Instead, six students (56.5%) completed between 16 and 20 hours. The remaining three students (27.3%) completed more than 20 hours of service during the semester. This might indicate that the students enjoyed the in-field activity and were willing to offer more service than was necessary to complete the course successfully. As part of the course requirements, each student had to write a reflection paper in which he or she had to discuss his or her own experiences in the community. Students were also assessed based on their participation in class discussions. Class discussions were particularly useful to measure students' ability to bridge theory and practice. Students' understanding of the theories covered in class was assessed through essay questions in two exams throughout the semester.

Drawing upon the experience with this first pilot project, we are now working to develop a comprehensive survey that will allow us to understand students' expectations prior to taking the course (with a pre-course survey) and measure whether their expectations were met throughout the service-learning experience (with a post-course survey). Although this project on family violence employs the most traditional approach to service learning, it also provides students with the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the unique features of the issue of family violence in their own community. In addition, this project provides victims of domestic violence and service providers with the unique opportunity to engage in a mutual exchange with our academic department in that they are given the opportunity to use the university as a medium to create awareness about the issue of domestic violence in our communities. Although this was not achieved directly through the pilot service-learning course, the collaboration developed among instructors, students, and service-learning providers has extended, and new initiatives are in our department's pipeline. For instance, instructors, students, and service providers are now organizing a domestic violence-awareness event that will take place on campus during the next months and will be open to the public. While contributing to changing perspectives within all individuals involved, a service-learning course can become the icebreaker for engaging in a broader sociopolitical discourse.

Different from the family-violence service-learning course that was offered to our undergraduate students, project 3 focused on a graduate-level service-learning course that involved students in the organization, completion, and delivery of an applied research project.

Project 3, titled *Service Learning Through Applied Community Research*, focuses on complex procedures of data collection directly from the local police and fire department agencies and the subsequent process of data analysis and report completion. In tune with Bringle and Hatcher's (1999) ideal of service-learning education, this project

provides both the students and the community with an experience for growth within a research framework. Students learn new statistical techniques and methods of interpretations of results. The partnering agencies have an opportunity to learn about their own performance goals and growth within the organization. In this project, service-learning becomes an “academic enterprise” because research-related community-service activities are embedded in the learning objectives of the course (Bringle and Hatcher 1999). In addition, the service-learning activities represent “high-quality” service and provide an opportunity for reciprocity (Bringle and Hatcher 1999) between the campus and the partnering agencies. Because formulating research inquiry requires both critical thinking and problem-solving strategies, with this project, students have the opportunity to develop a number of skills that are necessary for the development of our surrounding communities.

Service learning, in general, presents an educator with many different and diverse avenues to pursue, as evidenced by the several projects discussed in this article. At the graduate level, many students work full time and take classes at night, which limits the traditional service-learning options, requiring innovation to incorporate the concept into master’s-level courses. Throughout the 2011–2012 academic year, our graduate program underwent the NASPAA re-accreditation process, redefining its mission thusly as part of that process: “to sustain a diverse, collaborative community of learning that provides professional education to develop ethical, motivated, and effective leaders and to impact our changing region, nation, and world through community engagement and research.” It was the last part of the revised mission that formed the framework and impetus to conduct service-related research in the second of two required core statistics courses in the program. In spring 2013, a more ambitious project was undertaken and will be described here in detail.

Since January 2012, our faculty have been heavily involved in analyzing historic and current data from the local police and fire departments and in transforming that data into information to be used by policymakers and administrators for evidence-based decision making. It was a natural fit, based upon the revised department mission, to integrate the second graduate-level statistics course class project (statistics-based research) with the service goals inherent in the university-community relationship. Thus, the students continue to learn statistics but do so through providing a service to the community (knowledge about the delivery of fire and EMS services for the past decade) while working collaboratively as a class to produce a final professional product that gets presented to the city. This type of service learning has its benefits and drawbacks. The main benefits are that the service provided enhances the topical learning specific to the course. Students are required to utilize their knowledge, skills, and abilities to complete the analysis. In this specific project, they have to use SPSS at a high level to clean data; run create descriptive statistics and frequency tables; produce line graphs, bar charts, and histograms; and properly run a series of two-way ANOVAs to inform of the fire department’s performance over time (response time and total time on scene) based upon a set of pertinent variables. Structured this way, it is a project designed to show the students the real-world applications of the quantitative techniques they were required to

learn in the course while at the same time exposing them to management decisions and performance measurement in the public safety sector. They are also forced to manage the project as the professor takes on an advisory role, enhancing the professional applicability of the process. The clear benefit to the city is a full analysis of the performance of a vital city agency—the fire department, including EMS services—over a ten-year period for benchmarking and evaluation purposes. Classically optimal, the students' education is greatly enhanced and the city receives a service for no cost that would be extremely expensive to have conducted by outside consultants, if it would be done at all. Furthermore, the city and the students come together for the presentation of the results, and the city has a historical document to be used in the future.

There are also many drawbacks to this type of service-learning approach that differ from the other methods discussed in the other projects. Whereas the other projects depend on the collaboration with outside agencies in which the students can experience the reality of the community, this project suffers from internal issues that are common to group work. First, students can work on only one part of the project, meaning the students managing the project, editing and formatting the document, and working on the literature review are not focusing specifically on the class material, which is a limitation. It is not possible to have all students work on all facets of the project, so individual learning is fragmented and the parts are sacrificed for the whole. Class size also becomes an issue, with 30 students in the course making it harder to manage the project. As with any group project, regardless of its goals and aims, the free-rider issue is omnipresent and handled through grading being done each time the class meets, by the project managers, based upon the work produced in that session by each member of each group. Quality is also an issue, as the presentation of the full results is made to the city and the department's reputation is at the forefront, requiring the professor to commit an inordinate amount of time and energy to quality control, editing, revision, and analytical work above and beyond the normal time allocated to lecture, assignments, and grading of submitted work. The final internal issue is that in a project such as this, some groups work more in the initial stages and some students work more in the final stages, meaning managing the flow of the class becomes more difficult.

In all, for the first two iterations of our graduate research-based service-learning project, the benefits have outweighed the drawbacks on the whole. This type of service learning is very challenging from the professorial standpoint; requires great planning, effort, and work; and is suited to only certain courses within any program; however, this approach complements the more traditional and innovative methods of service learning implemented in the department to provide a wide spectrum of student service experience that fulfills the revised goals of our graduate program's mission. An analysis of this project through Morton's paradigms of *charity*, *project*, and *social change* is useful. Morton's paradigms suggest that during the course, students tend to offer their service (*charity*) to the partnering agencies without knowing whether their work (*project*) will have any effect on the community in the future. Upon completion of their degrees, however, students will have developed an articulate set of skills that will allow them to

(1) assess the needs of their community, (2) serve various agencies, and (3) influence *social change* (Morton 1995).

Whereas project 3 focuses on skill building activities at the same time as offering a useful service (and a final product) to agencies in the community, project 4 primarily focuses on service learning as an opportunity to grow at the personal level, learn from others, and understand diversity.

Project 4, titled *The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program*, discusses a course soon to be offered for the first time at our urban university that involves mutual exchanges between a group of university students (outside students) and a group of students selected from a correctional institution (inside students). According to Butin (2007), the Inside-Out course fits the idea of “service-learning as justice oriented education” in that it provides students with the opportunity to understand that “how we originally viewed the world and ourselves may be too simplistic and stereotypical” (Butin 2007:4). Within the Inside-Out framework, instructors lead students to reflections and transformations that would not be possible within the traditional classroom framework (Butin 2007). Embracing this philosophy of education, Inside-Out includes the three essential elements of service-learning education: theory, experience/practice, and reflection (Bingle and Hatcher 1999; Dewey 1933; Freire 1970). As Bingle and Hatcher put it, “Too often, the presentation of a theory by an instructor or in a textbook is viewed by students as an empty, pedantic venture. It is through active learning and the interplay between abstract, remote content and personal, palatable experiences that student learning is deepened and strengthened” (1999:112).

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program is not new to experts in service learning. It is a National Certified Program that was first introduced by Lori Pompa (Temple University) in 1997; since then, more than 300 instructors have been trained and certified to teach courses that fit the Inside-Out framework. Inside-Out courses are taught primarily in correctional institutions and comprise students from both the correctional facility (inside students) and the college or university (outside students), but both separate and combined meetings are arranged for the course. Whereas separate meetings are ideal for orientation and reflection sessions, combined meetings provide students with the opportunity for experiential learning. The Inside-Out framework is a unique model of service learning in that it provides students with the opportunity to become involved in a mutual exchange with individuals confined in correctional facilities. In this model, the assessment of service is based not on how much students will be able to “give” to the agency in which the service is completed but rather on the students’ ability to give and take in a mutual exchange in which everyone becomes empowered (Pompa 2002). Indeed, one of the major limitations of the traditional service-learning framework is that students are empowered in their role of providers, whereas the recipients of the service are often seen or labeled as victims, contributing to the students’ bias and inability to relate to those served (Chupp and Joseph 2010).

As we prepare to offer the Inside-Out Prison Exchange course at our institution, we are aware that one of the major challenges that instructors face while partnering with

correctional institutions refers to the cost of tuition for inside students and the lack of support from the academic institutions. Unfortunately, in many states, offenders are excluded from educational grants and many colleges and universities do not provide support to individuals with criminal history records (Alexander 2012). With respect to Inside-Out students, we now have two groups of schools: (1) schools that cover the tuition cost for the enrollment of inside students (University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, Michigan State University, DePaul University, Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario, Cornell University, Saint Lawrence University, and Amherst College) and (2) schools that provide inside students with certificates, most often to be validated at the time of enrollment as full-time student (examples include West Virginia University, University of Pennsylvania, Temple University, Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis, Xavier University, Minnesota State University Mankato, University of Delaware, Mount Holyoke College, and the College of Wooster Temple University House of Corrections).

As Freire's (2004) ideal of pedagogy would suggest, the Inside-Out program becomes the connector among various agencies in our communities, creating a number of stakeholders. In our particular case, we believe that the university will benefit from the Inside-Out course in that the course will provide students with experiential learning while providing a service to the community; indeed, the Inside-Out program embodies the spirit of civic engagement, community service, and development. Outside students (university students) will benefit from interacting with individuals from different backgrounds, personal experiences, and life trajectories. They will be able to fully immerse themselves in an experiential-learning opportunity based on mutual exchange with the inside students through which they would be likely to unveil many of the myths surrounding offenders (Austin and Irwin 2001). Inside students (those confined in correctional facilities) will benefit from the Inside-Out program in that they will have an opportunity to experience a university class and to become part of a learning environment in which students' viewpoints are valued and conflict is handled productively. Moreover, our community will also reap the long-term benefit from our academic courses that use the Inside-Out format in that they provide incarcerated individuals with an opportunity to become better citizens prior to returning to the same communities where they failed or to create opportunities to develop benign interests and a stake in conformity while incarcerated. The program would serve a dual purpose of providing much-needed access to a collegial environment and culture through the introduction of university professors and students and as a recruitment tool for future admission to the university. Throughout the process, we envision our university as an agent of change in that it will provide examples of successful transformation on multiple fronts, involving instructors, students, and the community. Although Inside-Out is not a reentry program but a unique type of pedagogy, it is undoubtedly a great opportunity for many talented people confined in correctional institutions to learn about new life opportunities. More than anything, however, Inside-Out is an opportunity to seek inspirations from the "inside out" of our institutions (both academic and correctional institutions), allowing ourselves, very humbly, to learn from one another.

Like other service-learning courses, the Inside-Out program will provide all our stakeholders with an exposure to diversity, reflecting the multifaceted problem related to the socioeconomic differences across all the strata of our local communities. As project 5, described next, highlights, respect for diversity and opportunities for diversity are key to the organization of effective service-learning courses.

Project 5, titled *Providing Guidelines to Respect Diversity in Service-Learning Curricula*, proposes to extend the competence of the existing service-learning and internship coordination center of the department with the intent of providing guidelines that would ensure the respect of diversity in the organization of service-learning courses. In addition, the center would also offer periodical reviews of the same courses to guarantee that the guidelines are observed and are providing the expected results. The literature on service learning emphasizes the importance of creating an evaluation process that would ascertain the students' and community partners' gains through participation in service-learning projects (Vogel and Seifer 2011). Within the ideal of integration, which sees the academic institution as an essential component in the process of social change (Freire 1970, 2009; Macedo 1993; Morton 1995), the evaluation process becomes a strategy that allows faculty and administrators to (1) ascertain that the selected activities match the course objectives (including the respect of diversity), (2) assess students' experience and growth within the program, and (3) measure the strength of the relationship between the campus and the agencies involved in the projects.

Diversity is often included as part of a broad academic discourse that aims to guarantee student integration and respect for cultural differences; however, while intent on delivering their service, many educators are unable to take into consideration the various aspects of student diversity. Diversity refers to gender, ethnicity, race, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and all the other aspects of one's background and experiences. Attempts to respect students' differences in our service-learning courses have not always produced the expected results (Levesque-Bristol, Knapp, and Fisher 2010). It is the diversity of gender, race/ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and all those divergent lived experiences that affect perceptions, expectations, ideology, and the learning environment.

The main goal of projects 1 through 4 is to create opportunities for students' professional and personal growth while improving partnership with community agencies and offering service through charity, research, or other project-based activities. This fifth project differs from all the other projects included in this article in that it proposes to provide guidelines to include diversity in all the service-learning courses offered in our department and to ensure the respect of the guidelines through peer-review activities. More specifically, this project proposes to extend the scope of the existing service-learning and internship coordination center to ensure that all the service-learning courses branded in our unit include pedagogical components of critical thinking and experiential learning in which diversity becomes the main resource rather than the obstacle. Our guidelines stress the importance of components of service-learning curricula that touch upon principles of reflective learning (Molee et al. 2010) and elements of what we call the perception-exposure-access (PEA) index. Reflection in service learning involves

gaining meaning and knowledge from one's experiences. Crews (1999), as cited in Seifer and Connors (2007), explains how the action-reflection theories of Dewey and Kolb have informed the service-learning process, the key tenets being the combination of individual action and engagement with reflective thinking leading to a much better understanding of the material being studied. Reflective-learning exercises (especially reflective writing assignments) are essential to understanding one's own experiences in the community. It is through reflective exercises that students are more likely to understand how the complexity of their own identities (based on gender, race, religion, etc.) shapes their understanding of the environment and of other people's realities (DasGupta and Charon 2004; Ruland and Ahern 2007).

The PEA index suggests that service-learning courses include discussion segments (via blogs, forums, journals, open class discussions, one-on-one conversations, or in-class presentations) through which instructors would learn more about students' differences. This allows us to examine each student's perception, exposure, and access as important factors in his or her social construction of reality. Because personal background characteristics such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, sexual orientation, and country of origin are likely to shape each student's *perception* of the environment in which service-learning activities take place, it is important that instructors have the opportunity to acknowledge their students' differences. Students also vary with respect to their *exposure* to diverse environments; therefore, it is important to take into consideration such levels of exposure prior to assigning students to specific agencies and prior to designing tasks pertinent to the students' service-learning objectives. Service-learning activities should not, by any means, turn into traumatic experiences for students who were never exposed to the realities of our communities. Knowing whether a student has had any prior contact with an agency that might have resulted in a negative emotional experience should be considered. By the same token, service-learning activities must match, as much as it is feasible, students' personal and career objectives. Based on these guidelines, tasks would then be assigned based on students' aptitudes and career preferences. Finally, instructors must also verify that students' experiences are as expected. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon to hear that partnering organizations utilize students' labor for purposes that are beyond the scope of higher-education courses (Levesque-Bristol et al. 2010). Students must be involved in meaningful tasks and have *access* to opportunities that would allow them to develop the skills identified as specific objectives for the course. In other words, students must be assigned to tasks that would allow them to develop a deep understanding of their field.

While these guidelines would allow instructors to add pedagogical components of their courses that ensure the respect of students' diversity, the service-learning and internship coordination center would also provide periodic peer reviews to guarantee the respect of the guidelines themselves. For our faculty, there will still remain the challenges of effectively considering the students' experiences, worldviews, and perceptions in designing service-learning courses. Thus, we have to employ innovative ways that will allow us to equally consider diversity, reflective learning, and PEA as a way of affecting the service-learning opportunities of our students.

Because service-learning courses are the means through which college students develop experiential learning, it is important that we constantly reassess whether experiential learning is actually happening. Furthermore, our school's location and curriculum make it even more important to enhance the educational experience of our students embracing the ideals of transformative learning. This action calls for some level of uniformity in the nature of assessments across the various courses. As research suggests, the use of personal journals and group discussions is essential to encourage and lead students to reflect upon their experiences (Eyler 2002). At the end of each semester, instructors would summarize data from the review of student journals and group discussions in a brief report that would measure the performance of the class for each service-learning course offered. The coordinator of the service-learning and internship center would then compare the reports compiled by each instructor across the courses. In addition, a structured questionnaire would be administered to students in each class (through an online survey system). Data from all the courses would then be combined for the quantitative analysis. It would also be very effective to measure the effect of the service-learning activities on the partnering agencies as a way to measure change within our communities (Vogel and Seifer 2011). However, funding is needed to support faculty to pursue this broader endeavor (Vogel and Seifer 2011). This activity would require long-term planning to provide evidence of such effect on the community within a longitudinal framework. Because service-learning courses are the means through which university students develop experiential learning, it is important that we constantly reassess whether experiential learning is actually happening.

Conclusions

This paper focuses on service learning as a necessary complement to traditional classroom courses in both undergraduate and graduate programs. It uses the most recent approach to service learning in that it considers educators, students, and the broader community as both the initiators and the beneficiaries of service. Following recent scholars on service learning (Chupp and Joseph 2010; Freire 2004; Pompa 2002), our department has recently identified five projects. In each project, service learning uniquely becomes a system of mutual interactions and exchanges among all the parties involved: educators, students, the department/university, and the partnering agencies within neighboring communities.

Project 1 (*Building Institutional Capacity and Social Capital through Service Learning*) and project 3 (*Service Learning Through Applied Community Research*) both provide opportunities for civic engagement to students enrolled in the MPA program. While both projects focus on the intellectual and professional development of graduate students, however, project 1 uniquely identifies the MPA program itself as one of the recipients of students' service. In other words, students in the course are challenged with the task of creating and organizing the community within the MPA program and become leaders in the process. Differently, in project 3, the instructor coordinates students in the collection, management, and analysis of data from local emergency agencies and

monitors them throughout the preparation of reports and presentations used to advise decision makers within the partnering communities.

Project 2 (*Family Violence Service Learning Course*) and project 4 (*The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program*) both provide opportunities for service learning to undergraduate students. The format, however, is not unique to the need for social and intellectual growth of undergraduate students, and the curricula of both these projects could be reshaped to better fit the needs of graduate students in our MPA program. Although similar in intent, projects 2 and 4 differ in that each defines service in a unique way. Whereas project 2 identifies service in what students provide to the partnering agencies, project 4 uses the exchange among all individuals involved as a service; it is through these social interactions that all parties involved have an opportunity for social and intellectual development.

Uniquely, project 5 (*Providing Guidelines to Respect Diversity in Service-Learning Curricula*) proposes to monitor the four courses already designed and highlighted in this paper by providing the guidelines for including and respecting diversity within the student body and the partnering agencies. Project 5 also proposes to monitor that students' expectations are met within the course and offers to extend the competence of the existing service-learning and internship coordination center to provide continuous reviews of the service-learning courses branded in our department. Based on these recommendations, our department will focus on pre-course and post-course surveys that will be used to (1) assess students' expectations within the course, (2) verify that students' expectations are met within the course, and (3) monitor changes (in the long term) in students' preferences and expectations over time to best serve the student population. Data would be collected from each course through the use of the same research instruments. This uniformity in the methods of assessment would enable the center to compare the overall performance in service-learning education across all the service-learning courses offered within the department.

In the future, it would be efficient to extend the assessment to the partnering agencies as a means to measure social change over time. Finally, we believe it would be efficient to also create a post-graduation survey in which former students have the opportunity to discuss how the service-learning experience helped them find jobs and successfully develop as professionals in the community in which they were trained. All these goals meet the expectations of our accreditation agencies. It is imperative that research tools are utilized to track the evolution of students' expectations and satisfaction with the service-learning program. As scholars (Vogel and Seifer 2011) suggest, however, although some evaluation activities can be completed within the normal teaching/service expectations (for faculty and administrators), longitudinal research conducted to measure the effect of service-learning courses might require that additional funding become available.

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