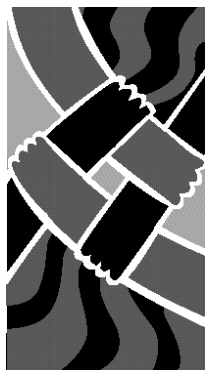


## Institutional Strategies to Involve First-Year Students in Service

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Providing entering students with an educational culture that promotes academic success is a high priority for campus administrators and faculty. It is estimated that one third of all first-year students drop out of the college they first enter (Levitz & Noel, 1998). Although this national average has remained fairly consistent over the past 20 years, retention has become a more important issue for higher education because of the pressure of increased public accountability and an ever-competitive allocation of shrinking public resources. Furthermore, colleges and universities have an internal imperative—for both ethical reasons and institutional health—to exert their best effort to retain students (Bean, 1986). Improving retention is ethically demanded because students who do not persist to graduation receive fewer benefits from their truncated educational experiences. They may exit the system having made a significant financial investment and accruing debt with little return. At the institutional level, tuition income is lost when students drop out, and recruiting new students to replace those who have left adds to the cost of attrition. Additionally, institutional reputation is diminished if retention rates are low, potentially contributing to lower faculty and staff morale (Bean, 1986).

A campus environment that strategically focuses on first-year success, and at the same time takes seriously the importance of civic engagement, holds great potential for providing meaningful educational experiences that can improve retention. As Tinto (1999) suggests, students who are active learners, both in and out of the classroom, are more likely to persist:

Students who are actively involved in learning activities and spend more time on task, especially with others, are more likely to learn and, in turn, more likely to stay. Unfortunately, most first-year students experience education as isolated learners.  
(p 6)

This chapter represents a case study of how Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) strategically involves first-year students in service-learning and

co-curricular service experiences as one of many institutional strategies to support retention. These are initial steps in developing a campus-wide culture that values the community engagement of faculty, staff, and students.

### **Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis**

IUPUI is a commuter campus that offers undergraduate and graduate degrees through 21 different schools of Indiana University and Purdue University. With an enrollment of 27,000, IUPUI attracts a high percentage of first-generation college students and adult learners working towards professional advancement. Over the past decade, the institution's student profile has become more traditional, with the average age of entering students now at 18.7 and the percentage of full-time students exceeding that of part-time students. Yet IUPUI still reflects the trend in higher education where

despite public impressions to the contrary, most students commute to college and work while taking classes. Many attend part-time and have significant obligations outside the college that limit the time they can spend on campus. For these students, indeed for most students, the classroom may be the only place where they meet faculty members and student peers, the one place where they engage the curriculum. (Tinto, 1999, p. 6)

#### *University College*

University College was created in 1997 to provide academic support to entering students prior to their formal admission to a degree-granting school (e.g., business, education, engineering and technology, liberal arts, social work). University College develops curricular and co-curricular initiatives to promote academic excellence and enhance first-year persistence. The faculty of University College come from every school on campus and are dedicated to improving undergraduate education. Together with professional staff (e.g., academic advisors, academic support staff, student affairs personnel) and campus administrators, the faculty provide academic leadership for University College. University College also coordinates the Peer Mentoring Learning Assistance Program, the Math Assistance Center, the Campus Orientation Program, Student Support Services, and the Honors Program. Hence, this unit is consistent with Tinto's recommendation of having an "organizational environment within which collaborative partnerships between academic and student affairs professionals are valued and creative responses to the questions of the first year are encouraged" (Tinto, 1999, p. 9).

#### *Learning Communities*

A cornerstone of University College is participation in Learning Communities (LC), a required one-credit class for all entering students. Unlike the common structure of a "learning community" in which students co-register for two or more classes with block scheduling (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990), the one-credit LC class at IUPUI has more in common with a first-year seminar (Jewler, 1989). It provides students, in a small class setting, with an introduction to academic culture, campus resources, and study skills that promote academic success. The template for learner outcomes includes increasing students' understanding of

the culture and context of the university, critical thinking and communication skills, technology and library skills, knowledge of campus resources, and familiarity with the academic advising process. A unique aspect of the IUPUI LC model is the use and nature of its instructional teams, which consist of a faculty member, an academic advisor, a librarian, and a student mentor who work together to design and conduct the class. The strength of such an instructional team is that it creates “learning environments that actively involve students, faculty members, and staff in shared learning activities” (Tinto, 1999, p. 5). LCs can stand alone as one-credit courses offered either through University College or individual departments; they can also be linked to a three-credit class, thus involving a cohort of students in a four-credit combination of two courses. University College staff consult with faculty from each of the schools on campus to design discipline-specific LCs based on the template of learner outcomes; however, each class is unique, because the curriculum and curricular strategies used by the instructional team vary.

### *Gateway Courses*

Gateway courses (e.g., English Composition, Psychology as a Social Science, Introduction to Sociology) have high first-year enrollment and typically serve as prerequisites for upper-level courses or graduation. A collaborative project between University College and the Center for Teaching and Learning in fall 2000 has allocated campus curriculum development resources for the improvement of 45 gateway courses. Faculty colloquia and curriculum development stipends provide instructors with resources to redesign their teaching and learning strategies in gateway courses so that first-year students are more actively involved in the learning process and, ultimately, more successful in their academic career at IUPUI. In Spring 2001, the campus received the Hesburgh Certificate of Excellence Award, a national award given by TIAA-CREF, in recognition of the Gateway Program to Enhance Student Retention.

### **Service-Learning at IUPUI**

As a metropolitan university, IUPUI joins other colleges and universities that take seriously their role as active citizens in their local communities (Bringle, Games, & Malloy, 1999). With this goal in mind, since 1993, campus resources have supported the Office of Service Learning in its efforts to integrate service into academic study. The Office of Service Learning is now one of three programs within the Center for Service and Learning (CSL), a centralized campus unit that involves students, faculty, and staff in service activities that mutually benefit the campus and community. The CSL (a) supports the development and implementation of service-learning classes, (b) increases campus participation in community service activities, (c) strengthens campus-community partnerships, (d) advances the scholarship of service, and (e) promotes civic engagement in higher education. From the onset, these campus units have reported to the chief academic officer. Having a centralized unit situated in academic affairs increases the likelihood that service-learning will be institutionalized as an enduring curricular expression of the campus’s commitment to civic engagement (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000).

IUPUI values service-learning as a curricular strategy that supports student success and contributes to the campus mission of building campus-community partnerships. The school defines service-learning as

a credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs, and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, p. 222; Zlotkowski, 1998)

Service-learning, then, is a course-based experience. Service in the community is a structured part of the course design and course expectations. This aspect of service-learning is especially important for commuter students who have competing demands on their time and limited interest in co-curricular activities. They do, however, want to be a part of the campus community, and for a sense of community to grow on a commuter campus requires nurturing first and foremost in the classroom (Kuh, 1991; Tinto, 1999). The collaborative nature of service-learning contributes to community building. Learning through service is also inherently active. Through structured reflection, students are asked to derive educational and personal lessons from their service to the community. In this way, service-learning contributes to new understanding and clarification of personal and educational goals.

Research on service-learning identifies learning outcomes that are important for all students, particularly first-year students. Research confirms that students who participate in service-learning tend to be actively engaged in the learning process, develop peer relationships, communicate more frequently with faculty both in and out of class, clarify career and educational options, clarify personal values, and see themselves as active contributors to the community (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Gray, Ondaatje, & Zakaras, 1999; Osborne, Hammerich, & Hensley, 1998; Sax & Astin, 1997). First-year participation in service-learning “increases the likelihood that students will discuss their experiences with each other, . . . that students will receive emotional support from faculty,” and that they will benefit from “an increased sense of personal efficacy, an increased awareness of the world around them, an increased awareness of . . . personal values, and increased engagement in the classroom experience” (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000, p. iii-iv). These outcomes are consistent with such dimensions of “first-year success” as developing academic and intellectual competence, establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships, developing personal identity, deciding on a career and lifestyle, maintaining personal health and wellness, and developing an integrated philosophy of life (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). Additionally, the retention literature is clear that interpersonal relationships with peers and faculty are critical to persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1987).

### *Service-Learning in Learning Communities*

The university’s dean of faculties and chief academic officer appointed the Service Learning Advisory Committee for University College in 1997 to advise faculty and instructional teams on integrating service-learning into the curriculum of first-year courses and to promote co-curricular service opportunities for entering students. The Service Learning Advisory Committee comprised faculty, staff, community agency representatives, and students. The committee reviewed literature, gathered program information from other campuses, conducted a focus-group of IUPUI students who had participated in service and service-learning, interviewed six IUPUI service-learning instructors, and spoke with three community agency

partners. This work led to the conclusion that designing community-based service experiences for first-year students is different than designing such activities for upperclass students who are typically more skilled, more experienced in managing academic responsibilities, and more confident in their career direction. The Service Learning Advisory Committee concluded that service-learning is an effective strategy to promote active learning and active citizenship; however, it must be well structured to meet the developmental needs of first-year students so that they can contribute effectively to a community agency. The committee provided a list of recommendations (e.g., group projects rather than individual projects, involvement of instructional team, clear rationale on syllabus) that is regularly distributed to LC instructors (Figure 1).

Although the one-credit hour course limits the amount of community service that can be expected of the students, a number of instructors have integrated a service component into their LC class (Table 1). The Kelly School of Business is the only school to date that requires service-learning for all entering students (approximately 600 each year). A partnership with Junior Achievement of Central Indiana, Inc., involves teams of first-year business students in presenting lessons on basic business and economic concepts to elementary students. Junior Achievement provides the curricular materials, and classroom teachers monitor the student presentations. A professional staff member in the Kelly School of Business coordinates program logistics. The goals of this service-learning component are for students to (a) learn to give back to the community, (b) develop group skills, and (c) acquire project management skills. The primary reflection activity is a required written report that includes lesson plans and asks students to think about the service component. Students who work during the day are expected to make special arrangements to complete the service component. The partnership with Junior Achievement has laid the foundation for the Kelly School of Business to develop other campus-community projects (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs of Central Indiana).

Another way to involve LCs in service-learning is to ask college students to host campus visits for middle school students. Campus tours provide an opportunity for college students to share their knowledge of the campus and to discuss educational aspirations with the visiting middle school students. The Center for Service and Learning distributes a Middle School Campus Visit Packet to instructional teams that includes information on arranging tours, names of middle school counselors and coordinators of after-school programs, tips on working with middle school students, and reflection activities. University College provides funds for transportation and refreshments. Students in LCs design campus tours based on the learning objectives of the course. For example, a communications class designed a letter exchange program between college students and middle school student pen pals and then hosted their pen pals for a campus visit.

#### *Service-Learning in Gateway Courses*

Due to large enrollment, integrating service-learning into a gateway course is, in many ways, a logistical challenge. The Center for Service and Learning (CSL) offers workshops on designing service-learning classes in gateway courses, consults with faculty on course design and implementation, and assists faculty with curricular development proposals. The CSL also offers Service-learning Assistant Scholarships (\$750 to \$1,500). These scholarships are awarded to students who assist with the implementation of service-learning in large enrollment classes.

Figure 1.

**Recommendations on Integrating Service into First-Year Courses**  
(IUPUI Service Learning Advisory Committee in University College)

- ◆ Design group service projects, rather than individual service activities, for entering students so that the service component is a way to build peer relationships and strengthen communication between the students and the instructional team. Group projects can lessen the anxiety that may be associated with venturing out into the community. Offering opportunities for first-year students to interact with faculty and staff in diverse roles is very beneficial.
- ◆ One-time service projects (e.g., painting a room at a community center, environmental cleanup activity, hosting a campus visit for middle school students) are recommended for entering students. While this is not always possible, it allows students to complete a project with a sense of accomplishment. A group of Learning Communities (LC) could commit to a larger, ongoing service project (e.g., preparing a vacant house for renovation) and “pass the torch” from one LC to the next over the semester in order to complete a larger service project.
- ◆ The LC instructional team can assume a variety of roles in the design, implementation, monitoring, and structured reflection of a service-learning component. Student mentors can be instrumental in assuming some responsibilities for details associated with integrating a service experience. The instructional team should plan, if possible, to supervise the service activity, so that the burden of supervision does not lie solely on the community agency.
- ◆ Include a clear description of the service component on the syllabus so that entering students are well aware of this course expectation and can plan accordingly. Entering students benefit from having a clear rationale for course expectations. Make the learning objectives of the service experience explicit in the syllabus, in class discussions, and in the reflection activities.
- ◆ Identify, early on, a community agency or school partner. Meet with agency staff to discuss, plan, and assess the service component. Work toward developing a partnership with the community agency or school, rather than simply a placement site. Invite the community partner to visit class prior to the service experience.
- ◆ Consider blocking out class time for the service experience, in the same way that one would block out time to visit the Career Center or complete a lab project. Or, plan for all of the LC classes from one school to convene on a Saturday to complete a school-wide service project. Provide dates on the syllabus.
- ◆ Recognize and celebrate the involvement of first-year students in the service project by providing pictures to the campus newspaper or school newsletter. Hold a celebratory event with community partners and invite students to participate in the campus-wide recognition hosted by the Center for Service and Learning.

Table 1.  
*Examples of Service-Learning in First-Year Courses at IUPUI*

School and Course Title	Community Partner and Service Activity	Number of Course Credits	Required or Optional Service	Group Project or Individual Service	Number of Service Hours
Business Learning Communities	Teach Junior Achievement curriculum in elementary schools	1	Required	Group project for entire class	10
Criminal Justice Learning Communities	Visit Indiana Boys School and sponsor a social event for young men	1	Optional	Group project	5
Liberal Arts Learning Communities	Write pen pals in middle school and host a campus tour	1	Required	Individual; Group project	8
Liberal Arts Communication Voice & Diction	Read stories to children at the campus Center for Children	3	Optional	Individual	10
Engineering Introduction to Construction Technology	Work on construction site with Habitat for Humanity	3	Required	Group project for entire class	6
Education Examining Self as Teacher	Tutor children in after-school programs at community centers	3	Required	Individual	10
Science Environmental Geography	Plant trees and environmental cleanup at the White River	3	Optional	Group project	6
Science Psychology as a Social Science	Read with elementary students at Riverside School	3	Required	Individual	30

Another strategy for integrating service into gateway courses is the Service-learning Option. The Center for Service and Learning has developed a Service-learning Option Packet for students to contract individually with a faculty member to

complete a service-learning component in a course. Gateway instructors receive information about the service-learning option, and although to date it has not been widely used, instructors who have had positive experiences with a small number of service-learning students will hopefully be more likely to design a service-learning course in the future.

A gateway course that has been developed as a campus prototype for service-learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996) is Environmental Geology. Coordinated by the faculty and staff in the interdisciplinary Center for Earth and Environmental Science, the service-learning component is part of a comprehensive and ongoing project to restore the banks of the White River, just west of the campus. Tree plantings, water testing, and environmental cleanups provide opportunities for many students to be involved at the same time and for students to conduct field-based research over time. Service-learning assistants provide support for implementing these service-learning projects. Because of the success of this service-learning class, other gateway courses have become involved in the project (e.g., Introduction to Oceanography, Physical Systems of the Environment, Introduction to Environmental Sciences). Environmental Geology makes extensive use of the web ([www.cees.iupui.edu](http://www.cees.iupui.edu)) for students to learn about the service-learning projects, sign on for project activities, complete volunteer forms, and keep up to date on project development.

### **Co-Curricular Service for First-Year Students**

An increasing number of entering students arrive on campus with prior experience in voluntary service (Sax & Astin, 1997), and this is the case for many IUPUI students. A survey conducted by the Center for Service and Learning (CSL) of 550 entering students at IUPUI found that 63% of the students had participated in community service during the previous year, with a median of 20 hours of service being reported, while 75% reported participating in community service during the previous five-year period. The survey also asked entering students about their interest in various types of community service; 86.6% of the respondents indicated that they would be "somewhat interested" or "very interested" in one-time service projects, followed by interest in contracting with an instructor for a service-learning option (80.8%), paid community service (76.2%), short-term service projects (65.3%), international projects (54.9%), service-learning classes (52.5%), and immersion projects (31.1%) (Bringle, Hatcher, & McIntosh, 1999).

These results indicate the importance of designing both curricular and co-curricular service opportunities for entering students that allow students to build on their past experiences, continue their involvement, respond to their interests, and become part of a culture of service during their first year on campus. The CSL has made significant progress in establishing onetime service events as a part of the educational culture of IUPUI. Since 1994, the campus has collaborated with United Way of Central Indiana to engage teams of faculty, students, and staff in a "Day of Caring" at United Way agencies during September. Since 1998, the CSL has also organized community service projects for teams to celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day as a "Day-On of Service" in January. In addition, CSL sponsors the "Jam the Bus" food drive in November, "Holiday Assistance Program" in December, and "Into the Parks" in April. These group service projects are promoted to LC instructional teams as a way to involve first-year students in campus activities and to promote camaraderie among students.



To increase student participation in all forms of community service, a professional staff position, the Coordinator for Community Service, was created in 2000. This position is jointly funded by the Center for Service and Learning and the Student Life and Diversity Programs in Student Affairs as an intentional way to bridge the gap that often exists between academic affairs and student affairs. The Coordinator for Community Service consults with instructional teams on middle school campus visits and onetime group service projects, provides program information for University College publications distributed to all entering students, works with student organizations on designing service projects, and collaborates with other student affairs staff to develop community service as a component of student life. Impressive results have occurred in a short amount of time as more and more students now participate in co-curricular service activities.

### *Freshman Service Scholarships*

IUPUI has made a significant decision to recognize community service as an area of merit in awarding campus scholarship dollars. The Center for Service and Learning coordinates an extensive Community Service Scholarship Program drawing upon \$100,000 of campus scholarship funds dedicated annually to recognizing students who have demonstrated a commitment to community service. The Community Service Scholarship Program is composed of five types of scholarships: Freshman Service Scholarships (\$2,000), Community Service Scholarships (\$3,000), Community Service Leader Scholarships (\$3,000), America Reads Team Leader Scholarships (\$2,000), and Service-learning Assistant Scholarships (\$1,500). The Freshman Service Scholarship provides an important means of attracting entering students who have had prior experience in service and service-learning. A cohort of 15 Freshman Service Scholars enrolls in a service-learning class (specifically, Psychology as a Social Science) during the fall semester, participates in three hours of community service each week during both semesters, participates in two group service projects, and attends monthly meetings with all Service Scholars in the spring. The Freshman Service Scholarship blends curricular and co-curricular community service experiences and develops connections among students and contacts on campus and in the community. In this way, the scholarship program can play a significant role both in the recruitment and the retention of first-year students.

### **Assessment**

The Office of Service Learning made an early commitment to develop a culture of evidence to assess the outcomes of service-learning. A research project conducted in 1994 suggests that first-year students in a service-learning class benefit in multiple ways. Journals of 133 first-year students who participated in Project X/L, a study skills class that linked underprepared first-year students with eighth grade students in a tutoring relationship for 10 weeks, were evaluated to assess self-reported learning outcomes. College students reported positive gains in self-confidence, improved perceptions of themselves as learners, stronger academic skills and competence, a better understanding of career and educational goals, and the ability to develop interpersonal relationships with peers (Hatcher & Oblander, 1998).

An end-of-course survey was developed by the Office of Service Learning in 1997 and distributed to all service-learning instructors to administer at the end of the semester. This survey included items to assess students' progress towards the

Principles of Undergraduate Learning. The Principles of Undergraduate Learning (i.e., core communication skills, quantitative skills, critical thinking, integration and application of knowledge, intellectual depth and breadth, adaptiveness, understanding society and culture, values and ethics) provide a framework for the development of a common undergraduate experience at IUPUI. When respondents in service-learning classes were compared to a random sample of continuing IUPUI students, students in service-learning classes scored significantly higher on in-depth understanding of course material, ability to relate knowledge with practice, understanding different people and traditions, and appreciation of ethical standards (see Table 2). In addition, the researchers compared students in three-credit hour service-learning classes to students in three-credit-hour classes that did not include a service component and to students in one-credit-hour Learning Communities that included a service component. Higher scores were reported for students in three-credit-hour service-learning classes on all items associated with IUPUI's Principles of Undergraduate Learning, except quantitative skills and computer skills (Bringle,

Table 2.

*Comparison of Service-Learning Students to Returning Continuing Students on IUPUI's Principles of Undergraduate Learning*

Item	Service-Learning Students	Continuing Students
In-depth understanding of course material	3.77	3.32 *
Ability to critically examine ideas and issues	3.86	3.20 *
Ability to relate knowledge with practice	4.09	3.29 *
Ability to express facts or ideas in writing	3.60	3.34 *
Speaking in a small group setting	3.67	3.22 *
Speaking to a large group	3.16	2.69 *
Ability to integrate knowledge from several fields	3.55	3.15 *
Ability to view events from different perspectives	3.87	2.97 *
Developing a sense of values and ethical standards	3.64	2.76 *
Ability to make sense of personal and social experiences	3.84	2.87 *
Understanding different people and traditions	3.79	2.87 *

\*  $p < .05$

Hatcher, & McIntosh, 1999). These results testify to the considerable academic role that service-learning can play in support of student learning. As IUPUI more carefully examines and discusses general education for undergraduate students, it will be important to inform the campus community of the potential of various educational strategies, including service-learning.

### Conclusion

Although many of the factors that lead to student success and persistence are pre-entry attributes that are not easily influenced by academic culture such as goals, commitments, family level of education, institutional experiences (e.g., formal interactions with faculty and staff, out-of-class interactions with peers, informal interactions with others) can be designed to support more fully the academic and social integration of first-year students (Bean, 1986). Research indicates that active involvement in coursework is critical for first-year success. Perhaps the single most important factor contributing to campus climate is what occurs in the classroom. Because service-learning shows promise for improving first-year learning outcomes and contributing to first-year persistence, its potential is valued by University College. Furthermore, service-learning is valued at IUPUI as an important institutional strategy to create a campus climate that supports student engagement in the community (Boyte & Hollander, 1999).

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