Chapter 8

Service Learning for the Community College Student

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ABSTRACT

This chapter outlines the many reasons behind a consistent and relevant implementation of service learning opportunities on community college campuses. Community colleges typically serve non-traditional students. As part of a broad and interconnected curricula, community colleges should develop quality service learning opportunities tailored to the non-traditional student and their local community. This chapter offers a roadmap for creating service learning opportunities ranging from an initial community needs analysis to volunteer recruitment and management. The author of this chapter spends a considerable amount of time on reflection activities, which is vital to the success of service learning.
INTRODUCTION

Service learning provides students with a valuable opportunity to serve their community, learn marketable skills, and assess career ambitions. While traditional students can gain tremendously through service learning, non-traditional students can expect more profound personal growth and understanding. Many non-traditional college students choose to attend community colleges due to financial constraints, program offerings, and geographic convenience. Community colleges tend to be less expensive and less time consuming. For a father of two interested in reinventing himself as a tradesman, community colleges offer a short term, inexpensive path to gainful employment. Too often, however, community colleges lack opportunities for growth outside of the classroom and prescribed curricula.

Service learning opportunities offer students experiences that shape their understanding of the world they live in. Because non-traditional students typically live in a starkly contrasted world than the traditional student, they should be offered service learning as it applies to their unique experiences. Consider the following real life example: A 35-year-old mother of three has routinely been subjected to domestic violence. Having been on the receiving side of social work for nearly 18 years, she feels that she has successfully escaped from a life of violence and fear. Now, as a returning college student, she intends on becoming a social worker in order to give back to her community and aid women in violent situations. A quality service learning experience will give her the tools necessary to take a meaningful look at the pros and cons of joining the social work profession. Additionally, she will be volunteering in a position that gives her the capacity to offer critical services to her community.

The anecdotal story of the father of two and the real-life story of the mother of three sheds light on the potential demographic of non-traditional service learning students at a community college. Students at this stage of life often are not exposed to the value of volunteer work for their personal wellbeing and the wellbeing of their community. This is a glaring oversight of community college leadership. However, there are models for addressing these shortcomings. This chapter discusses those models and offers strategies for incorporating service in the two-year college experience.

The Campus Compact is an organization that seeks to build a more engaged citizenry through institutions of higher education. From 2012-2014 they piloted a program called Connect2Complete, or C2C. The C2C pilot project combines service-learning and peer advocacy for low-income community college students in developmental education classes” (Berger, 2015). Essentially, C2C is a peer-based program being utilized at community colleges to enhance retention and add depth
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