COMPONENTS OF SUCCESSFUL SERVICE-LEARNING PROGRAMS:
NOTES FROM BARBARA HOLLAND, DIRECTOR OF THE U.S.
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Abstract
This paper presents one expert's views on the required components of successfully designing and implementing an interactive teaching pedagogy called service-learning. The paper is largely drawn from an interview with Barbara Holland, a respected pioneer and international advocate for service-learning and university-community engagement. The paper aims to provide interested faculty with both a better understanding of what service-learning is as well as an overview of the student, faculty, community partner, and institutional motivations and commitments related to service-learning program success.

KEY WORDS: Service-learning, institutional engagement, University-community partnership programs, international expansion.

INTRODUCTION

"If you look across higher education history (globally,) you will find that we are at the end of an era when research and teaching were dominated by modes that called for detached and disinterested observation and analysis of the world, and we are entering a new era where knowledge generation is ever more dependent on dynamic information-driven relationships and networks of expertise. Thus, engagement (and service-learning as a pedagogy) is a component part of a larger reformation of discovery, interpretation, application, and dissemination of knowledge on both local and global scales."

– Barbara Holland [Interview, May 12, 2006, California]

The authors’ objective is to introduce readers to service-learning pedagogy through a discussion of the motivations behind, and the components required for, successful service-learning program design and implementation. The authors use their collective experiences as service-learning authors and practitioners to introduce and explain the views and comments of a U.S.-based service-learning expert, Barbara Holland. Barbara Holland has a long history in the field of experiential education and community engagement for higher education.¹ She is the Director of the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, a Senior Scholar in the Center for Service and Learning at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, and an Adjunct Professor at University of Western Sydney and Australian Catholic
University. She is a frequent speaker at universities and conferences around the world. Her areas of expertise include curricular design, institutional-level program change, and best practices in engagement initiatives. The paper draws upon an extended on-line interview with Barbara Holland that took place between March 2-12, 2006. The first section of the paper presents Holland’s definition of service-learning. The second section summarizes the key ingredients needed for high quality service-learning. The third section presents Holland’s views on the key motivations that lead faculty to be involved in this pedagogy. The next two sections offer some of her views on the level of commitment all project partners need to agree to. The paper concludes with Holland’s views on the motivations of people from various countries for engaging in service-learning and a discussion of the future and applicability of service-learning as a pedagogy in many different settings.

**SERVICE-LEARNING: A DEFINITION AND EXAMPLE**

Holland’s definition of service-learning stems from the way the term is written. Many scholars in the service-learning domain argue that the term “service-learning” should not be written as two distinct words; rather, it should include a hyphen to clearly symbolize the link between the two concepts, service and learning. As Holland explains, “Service-learning is all in the hyphen. It is the enrichment of specific learning goals through structured community service opportunities that respond to community-identified needs and opportunities. Service-learning is an interactive pedagogy that requires the development of effective partnership relationships.”

One of the essential components of successful service-learning engagements is reflection [Newmann, 1990]. Holland adds to her definition of service-learning by highlighting the importance (in fact, the requirement) of reflection as a component of service-learning design, “Among different modes of experiential learning, the distinguishing characteristic of service-learning is the introduction and use of guided reflection to make connections for students between their community experience, classroom learning, and their future development as active, involved citizens.”

Holland differentiates service-learning from other kinds of experiential field-based learning. She draws her observations from her experiences as a designer, practitioner, and consultant for campus-community engagement programs. She argues that institutions need to develop a clear understanding of the distinctions between internships, practica, service-learning, volunteerism, and cooperative education or other kinds of work-based learning.

“The distinctions between these experiential learning opportunities are defined by the kind of attached learning goals for the student and the expectation for benefit to the community. Imagine a continuum with internships on one end and volunteerism on the other. Internships are intended for the career and professional development of students and typically operate under the supervision of practicing professionals. On the other end of the continuum, volunteerism which is co-curricular, does not have assessed learning goals and is largely self-directed. Volunteerism is primarily for the benefit of the community, even though it may give students a sense of personal enrichment.

Service-learning, however, falls somewhere in between internships and volunteerism. There is intended benefit for both students and community organizations. Service-learning projects tend to be confused with internships. Internships may provide benefits for organizations. However, the ultimate outcome is measured primarily by what the students learn. Any benefit to the organization is somewhat incidental to that experience. Also, with internships, students do not necessarily have the reflection components dwelling on social/civic interpretations and lessons learned. In contrast, service-learning is meant to be mutually-beneficial to student and community.”

Figure 1 illustrates a visual representation of Holland’s continuum.
Holland does not explicitly urge institutions to adopt service-learning at the expense of other pedagogies. Indeed, she specifically states, “Too often people who have become advocates of service-learning as cutting-edge pedagogy come across as saying, ‘Everyone should do service-learning.’ That seems misguided to me…” Rather, the continuum demonstrates how each pedagogical approach targets different, yet complementary, institutional objectives. With a definition and continuum explained, she recounts an example of a high quality service-learning project,

“In a small, isolated community with no local recycling, students organized themselves to partner with a nearby, larger community to make recycling feasible. The students raised money and purchased large containers to collect recycled materials in their community, worked to educate residents on recycling, and then arranged to truck the waste on a regular schedule to the larger community. They brought recycling services to their community, while learning the science and economics of waste management and recycling. This project was connected to a biology class in which they were learning about environmental sustainability and public policy. There are similarly wonderful examples in every discipline.”

The example above is almost utopian – one project delivering applied student learning, positive changes in the local community, and sustainability. Holland cites this biology class project as an example that yields ideal, tangible and intangible outcomes, goals of all service-learning initiatives.

**KEY INGREDIENTS IN HIGH QUALITY SERVICE-LEARNING**

Creating tangible and intangible benefits for involved participants is not an easy task. It requires motivation and willingness of all involved parties to work toward a common goal. It requires inter-institutional collaboration and partnering. While effective partnerships between universities and community organizations are required, they are one of the most challenging aspects of creating high quality service-learning programs [Enos and Morton, 2003]. As Holland points out:

“The ideal service-learning project involves faculty, students and community working together. At its very best, clear service-learning goals are jointly defined and have a rich meaning for the instructors, the partners participating as co-teachers in the community setting, and of course the students. When learning goals are clearly defined and articulated, students are better able to understand how community activity enriches their education, learning and sense of self in society…. It is intriguing how much high-quality service-learning depends to a great degree on two things: 1) individual instructor interest in teaching in interactive modes and with a community partner as collaborator; 2) the level of interaction between instructor and community partner in jointly designing the community-based activity to match the learning goals for the students.
Weak service-learning programs tend to be deficient in those areas. For example, a program will be weaker if the instructor does not make sure that community partners understand the specific learning goals for the students. This lack of collaboration can lead to students doing work such as filing in an office which does not support academic learning goals. Such assignments may suggest that service-learning lacks intellectual rigor. Another essential ingredient to high-quality service-learning is time. The very best programs provide ample time for instructors and community partners to work together, to plan together, and to prepare so students experience service-learning as coherent, well-planned, and rich. When everyone understands their role, service-learning is rewarding for everyone – instructors, students, community, and the institution.

Holland readily admits service-learning is not for everyone. Compared to other pedagogy, service-learning takes additional time from all participants and is difficult to do. It requires commitment on the part of the faculty member, institutional administration, community partner, and students. As the figure below illustrates, developing a program that meets the needs of four constituents is not an easy task. There is a small space for agreement; as a result, it usually takes a lot of work to correctly position a program as a “win-win” mutually-beneficial engagement for all involved parties.

Although developing effective service-learning projects and programs is not easy, there are a number of resources designed to assist with this difficult process. There are numerous books and guides on how to run service-learning projects and programs. Many of these resources provide best practice guides for implementing service-learning at the project, course, and institutional levels. In fact, service-learning implementation is so multifaceted that there is even a website called “The Big Dummy’s Guide to Service-Learning” (see http://www.fiu.edu/~time4chg/Library/bigdummy.html). For a list of organizations and journals disseminating service-learning best practices, refer to Appendix 1.
FACULTY MOTIVATIONS FOR INVOLVEMENT IN SERVICE-LEARNING

As Holland states above, faculty members are the key players in determining the success or failure of service-programs. But why do faculty espouse the method if service-learning requires so much effort to be successful? What makes service-learning worth the work? Holland suggests that two benefits are primary motivators for faculty --- enhanced student-related outcomes and increasing opportunities for publication.

STUDENT-RELATED OUTCOMES

Regarding student-related outcomes, Holland notes that service-learning has a positive impact on student learning and retention rates. She described the results of a current as-yet-unpublished research project that focuses on academic learning:

“I am a member of a research team examining students’ learning in freshman composition. Two sections used service-learning as a pedagogy while the other sections did not. The learning goals for all sections were the same, so the research team could measure the students’ work on the same scale. At the end of the two-semester sequence, the team pulled sample papers from all the sections of freshman composition. The team focused on students with skill levels similar to those of the students in the service-learning cohorts. The service-learning cohort students performed 25% - 35% better on every measure of composition, such as rhetoric, grammar, evidence, argumentation, etc. There have been other similar studies finding positive academic learning outcomes in service-learning courses, but this study stands out because it uses more control variables and thus demonstrates more clearly the causal connections between the service-learning and student outcomes.”

Retention is another important student-level outcome. Recent research has identified a positive relationship between participation in service-learning projects and student retention in university programs [Keup, 2005; Swail, Redd, and Perna, 2003]. Holland’s professional experiences and personal views support these findings,

“Apparently, this kind of active learning pedagogy is appealing to students of today who want to be stimulated and want education to be interesting. Students engaged in service-learning are more likely to remain in school and to persevere toward a degree. Service-learning gives students greater self-assurance in the critical mediating factors for student retention – self-confidence, communication, time management, self efficacy – and can reduce time-to-degree-completion. This is particularly important today. In our global knowledge economy, every country’s economic stability and future success is highly dependant on raising the intellectual achievement and formal educational levels of its residents. Why? Because an idea- and knowledge-based economy depends on people’s mind power. Service-learning has been effective in raising the educational ambitions of populations currently underrepresented in post-secondary education.”

PUBLICATION AND RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Time spent preparing for and running classes is an investment for faculty; as with any investment, one of the goals is to receive a return. One of the greatest returns for faculty members’ investment of time is published papers. Engaging in service-learning activities provides opportunities for faculty to leverage their investments into rewards. The recent expansion of service-learning application has resulted in an increase in service-learning scholarship. The Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning is an internationally refereed journal specifically targeted at publication of service-learning scholarship. There have been special issues on service-learning in international journals such as Journal of Business Ethics, and the Academy of Management Learning & Education.

Holland observes that an expansion of faculty research opportunities may occur through the increasing emphasis on student service-learning research. She notes that “now we are seeing a growth in undergraduate service-learning research to link academic research to community-identified questions. For example, Duke, Cornell, Rutgers, Penn State, Princeton, University of Pennsylvania and others – have introduced undergraduate service-learning research. For example, the Duke University model takes students through a three-course sequence in beginning, intermediate and advanced community-based
research methods. In cooperation with community partners, students design and execute research studies and then create research reports for both the academic and community audience.

Holland also points out that many universities are beginning to introduce service-learning and community-based research into graduate study. She suggests that there are long-term benefits:

“...because many students who aspire to an academic or research career are going to move into their first positions knowing how research and knowledge can impact community issues. In five or six years, there will be a significant proportion of the next generation of faculty who embrace and are committed to community-based scholarship as part of their academic career. Service-learning and engaged research are beginning to transform academic culture and value systems. In the U.S.A. aspects of engaged research and teaching are being integrated into various recognition and classification systems such as the Carnegie classification system, regional accreditation standards, research grant criteria, and even popular rating systems like US News and World Report. The question of validity of engagement as a form of research and a mode of teaching is answered; this is now a valid, legitimized and valued form of teaching and research. Engaged research and learning are becoming attached to institutional excellence and so each postsecondary institution must develop a clear and intentional agenda for engagement as a component of its particular mission.”

COMMUNITY PARTNER COMMITMENT

Holland explains that, “Building reciprocal and sustainable partnerships with community partners remains perhaps the greatest challenge for academic institutions.” However, community partners typically seek different service-learning outcomes than faculty and students. Traditionally, communities were seen more as laboratories for learning than as ‘sources’ of learning and new knowledge through collaboration. However,

“Community partners deeply understand the primary goal of service-learning is to address learning goals for students through activities that benefit the community. They want to know what those specific learning goals are and they want to work one-on-one with the faculty to articulate and negotiate how they can create an activity that would truly match their needs with the learning goals for students. Community partners self-identify as co-teachers in service-learning and strongly understand how they impart teaching and learning to the students. They feel passionate about their commitment to student learning and have their own learning goals for students including the desire to have students learn more about the community they are in, especially if students are from somewhere else; to understand the nonprofit sector; to consider careers in nonprofit work; to understand the public issues their organization is trying to address; and to awaken an activist spirit in the students.”

These observations suggest that well-structured academic-community organization partnerships involve partners who have a clear understanding of their mutual and separate goals for the experience, their roles, and the attainable outcomes for the community.

INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT

The fourth constituent is the institution – the University. For many universities, service-learning is a tool through which institutional-level objectives can be attained (e.g., civic engagement, social responsibility, pro-bono assistance to the local community, outreach to prospective students, increasing the probability of receiving grants or donations). Through her administrative roles at several universities, Holland has developed a definite perspective on why university administrators support service-learning and what is required for effective institutional involvement:

“Now that service-learning has become a valued academic strategy, each institution needs to make decisions as to what degree engaged teaching and research should be part of their mission and academic culture. The typical starting point is for the campus community to have a challenging discussion as to the specific learning goals for students – what does it mean to be a graduate of the institution – and then mapping out where these goals will be realized in the curriculum and the co-curriculum.”
Holland suggests that such a process will help an institution articulate a vision for the role of experiential learning and what proportion of the institution’s experiential learning activities should be service-learning. The process,

“...helps build institutional commitment – faculty come and go, students come and go, institutional administrators come and go, but the institution that engages in such a process develops a curriculum that demonstrates a commitment to service-learning. Embedding service-learning in the curriculum is an assurance to community partners that this is a sustainable relationship.”

The benefit of an institution-wide discussion, according to Holland, is that “…it creates an institutional vision for the role of engaged teaching and research.” Institutions differentiate themselves on this basis (i.e., some institutions see engagement as more central to their mission than others). She identifies Portland State University and California State University-Monterey Bay as two examples of public institutions of higher education where every student, undergraduate and graduate, is expected to be involved in service-learning. Both institutions have established service-learning and civic engagement as integral parts of their missions. These two institutions have extensive U.S.-based and global research and teaching programs. Holland further observes, “…the core defining identity of each institution is that its teaching and research demonstrates strong alignment with its immediate region…”

COMMITMENTS ABROAD: INTERNATIONAL SERVICE LEARNING

The world has become a much smaller place than it was ten or twenty years ago. For example, most large businesses are multinational with satellite operations on more than one continent, the Internet provides universal access to the same information to people all over the planet, international travel is a commonplace event for people from many regions of the world, and treaties have removed former dividing lines between countries (e.g., NAFTA, the formation of the European Union).

Service-learning is no different. While service-learning has its roots in U.S. institutions of higher education, it is beginning to gain international prominence. The method is being applied in North America, South America, Australia, Europe, Africa, and Asia. Holland points to specific facts about the rapid global growth in service-learning implementation. She points to service-learning conferences and summits that have been held in Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Australia, India, Thailand, South Africa, Ireland, Germany, Spain, and Italy and to the growth of international service-learning exchanges. Holland explains that service-learning is becoming so popular internationally because:

“Each nation attaches different kinds of goals to service-learning based on history and current conditions or challenges. In the U.S., the concept of service-learning is that the desired learning outcomes will best be met through interaction in a community-based setting – a nonprofit, business, government, neighborhood of residents. Our (U.S.) interest in service-learning is strongly connected to a desire to build a nation with citizens who both understand and contribute positively to social and civic issues - to encourage the next generations to be motivated to actively participate in civic life and democratic processes. In South Africa the idea of service-learning is attached to nation-building; reconstructing the nation’s physical and social infrastructure by involving students in community development and in the development of the practical skills of democracy. In Eastern Europe it’s very much about understanding the role of education in democracy, a new opportunity in that part of the world. In other countries it’s about strengthening a sense of volunteerism and philanthropy – which is primarily an American phenomenon. In still other countries it’s about strengthening the non-government sector.

Not all countries are as concerned as we are in the U.S. about political apathy among youth, but most countries seem to share the fundamental belief that an educated citizenry is essential to the practice of a democratic society. This doesn’t mean we are necessarily teaching citizenship; more often it means we want students to understand the role of an educated person in society.”

SUMMARY

Barbara Holland’s deep commitment to the enrichment of student, faculty, and community experiences is evident in her career and in her comments in this article. Her insights into service-learning provide a lens through which involved students and faculty can better understand their own service-learning efforts. Although a universal definition of service-learning has not yet been accepted by the
international community (see various definitions in Appendix 2), Holland’s comments describe the components of successful service-learning engagement (i.e., interactive involvement of faculty, students, the University, and community). Faculty motivations emanate from enhanced student outcomes and increased opportunities for scholarly publication. In her recommendations for developing strong community partnerships, she identifies the importance of designing mutually beneficial projects and she underscores the critical element of institutional support. Holland’s extensive international experience is the foundation for her views on the varying motivations of individuals from different countries for engaging in service-learning. In short, Holland provides a definition of service-learning, reasons why participants support service-learning, and key components for developing service-learning.

APPENDIX 1

SERVICE-LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS AND JOURNALS

**Campus Compact** is a membership coalition consisting of over 950 college and university presidents who have joined forces with the main purpose of increasing service programs that fulfill the public purposes of higher education. Through a national office and a network of 31 state offices, member institutions gain access to the resources they need to build campus-community partnerships and teach students (combined enrollment at member campuses is over 5 million students) the skills and values of democracy. Campus Compact was organized in 1985 by the presidents of three universities and the president of the Education Commission of the States ([www.compact.org](http://www.compact.org)).

**International Partnership for Service-Learning** has two related missions: (1) offering programs uniting academic study and volunteer service to the community in international/intercultural settings that are models for the practice of service-learning, and (2) promoting the theory and practice of service-learning through research, publications, conferences, and training ([www.ipsl.org](http://www.ipsl.org)).

**Learn and Serve America**, a major program of the Corporation for National and Community Service in the United States, provides direct federal funding to schools, institutions of higher education, community-based organizations and tribal nations to promote quality and to grow service-learning programs ([www.learnandserve.org](http://www.learnandserve.org)).

**Metropolitan Universities** is the journal of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities, founded in 1989 and now a membership group of more than 80 universities in the United States, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom. All of the member institutions identify with an urban or metropolitan mission defined by connecting their teaching and research to the issues of their urban and metropolitan communities ([http://muj.uc.iupui.edu/](http://muj.uc.iupui.edu/)).

**Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning** (MJCSL) is a national, peer-reviewed journal consisting of articles written by faculty and service-learning educators on research, theory, pedagogy, and issues pertinent to the service-learning community. The MJCSL aims to widen the community of service-learning educators; sustain and develop the intellectual vigor of those in this community; encourage research and pedagogical scholarship related to service-learning; contribute to the academic legitimacy of service-learning; and increase the number of students and faculty who have a chance to experience the rich teaching and learning benefits that accrue to service-learning participants ([www.umich.edu/~mjcsl/](http://www.umich.edu/~mjcsl/)).

**National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (NSLC)** is funded by Learn and Serve America Corporation. The clearinghouse activities support service learning in higher education, public schools (K-12), community-based initiatives, and tribal programs as well as others interested in encouraging schools and communities to initiate service learning techniques and methodologies or to improve existing programs ([www.servicelearning.org](http://www.servicelearning.org)).
APPENDIX 2
DEFINITIONS OF SERVICE LEARNING

Service-learning means a method under which students learn and develop through thoughtfully organized service that: is conducted in and meets the needs of a community and is coordinated with an institution of higher education, and with the community; helps foster civic responsibility; is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students enrolled; and includes structured time for students to reflect on the service experience [adapted by the American Association for Higher Education: Series on Service-Learning in the Disciplines, from the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993].

Service-learning combines service objectives with learning objectives with the intent that the activity changes both the recipient and the provider of the service. This is accomplished by combining service tasks with structured opportunities that link the task to self-reflection, self discovery, and the acquisition and comprehension of values, skills, and knowledge content [www.Servicelearning.org; accessed March 2006].

Service-learning is the [name for the] various pedagogies that link community service and academic study so that each strengthens the other. The basic theory of service-learning is Dewey's: the interaction of knowledge and skills with experience is key to learning. Students learn best, not by reading the Great Books in a closed room, but by opening the doors and windows of experience. Learning starts with a problem and continues with the application of increasingly complex ideas and increasingly sophisticated skills to increasingly complicated problems [Ehrlich, 1996].

[In service-learning consulting projects] students engage in real-world, concrete, professional, semester-long consulting experiences designed to enhance concepts and skills learned in the classroom. This perspective is called the “exposure and understanding” argument for service-learning integration. It exposes students to real-world issues in their local communities (e.g., homelessness, violence, poverty) and then challenges them to think through the complexities of these issues, their short- and long-term implications, and the potential for business/community partnerships capable of addressing them. [Kenworthy-U'Ren, 2000]

ENDNOTE

1. For more information about Barbara Holland, visit the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse website at http://www.servicelearning.org/who_we_are/staff/index.php or email her directly at Barbara@etr.org.

REFERENCES


