

# Campus and Community Partnerships: Assessing Impacts & Strengthening Connections

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*Research on service-learning tends to emphasize student learning outcomes and pedagogical issues and de-emphasize the community voice. To be true to the dual responsibility of service-learning to both campus and community constituencies, research must include both campus and community viewpoints. This paper is based on findings from a research project to assess community agency viewpoints about student service providers, and based on the data, provides suggestions for improving campus and community service-learning partnerships.*

Research pertaining to service-learning as a viable pedagogy continues to expand as higher education institutions and school districts nationwide look to service-learning as a means to enhance students' public participation, active learning, and contributions to communities. Existing literature makes clear that service-learning engages students in meaningful service and provides learning experiences to enhance classroom teaching (Astin & Sax, 1998). Research on student impacts also points out that service-learning enhances students' psychosocial and moral reasoning abilities (Boss, 1994; Kuh, Douglas, Lund, & Ramin-Gyurnek, 1994). Faculty also benefit from involvement in service-learning through the application of theory and knowledge to local problem solving (Lynton, 1995). What is less clear, however, is the community's perspective on campus-based service-learning initiatives.

Service-learning is a way for campuses to strengthen their public service missions, and successful service-learning collaborations between campuses and communities rely on equitable partnerships to meet respective parties' goals (Gugerty & Swezey, 1996). Hollander (1998) elaborates on the "engaged campus" as a place that blurs boundaries between campus and community, as well as between knowledge and practice: "The engaged campus is not just located in a community; it is intimately connected to the public purposes and aspirations of community life itself" (p. 3). Service-learning is a means to make real the engaged campus. A review of the current literature on service-learning, however, reveals a general lack of attention to the community partner in service-learning (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 1997). If the community continues to be overlooked in service-learning research, then ser-

vice-learning may become yet another example of an "ivory tower" approach to community "partnerships" in which the community is merely an educational laboratory and not a true partner (Holland & Gelmon, 1998).

Service-learning originally sought to develop a win-win-win relationship between the faculty, students, and recipients of service because principles underlying service-learning are deeply rooted in *both* the campus and community perspectives (Sigmon, 1979). Yet service-learning research has overwhelmingly tended to emphasize impacts related to student learning and pedagogical issues at the expense of community impacts.

One important purpose of research is to guide effective practice. Thus, the research on service-learning needs to reflect both the original goals of *service* and *learning*. If service-learning researchers continue to ignore the community perspective, then we are perpetuating the hierarchical and potentially destructive relationship between campuses and their surrounding communities that service-learning implicitly seeks to remedy. By failing to look at communities as active partners, those involved in service-learning risk maintaining the status quo in campus-community relations.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the community's perceptions of students and faculty involved in service-learning as well as campus outreach initiatives. In addition, the paper seeks to provide specific recommendations for making service-learning an endeavor that is marked by reciprocity and collaboration.

Before identifying the questions that guided this research, we review some more of the service-learning literature to demonstrate the need for research on