Incorporating Service Learning into Public Affairs Programs: Lessons from the Literature

Mark T. Imperial
University of North Carolina at Wilmington

James L. Perry
Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis

Michael C. Katula
Indiana University, Bloomington

ABSTRACT

This article reviews the growing literature on citizen service since 1990 to identify design principles to guide the incorporation of a service learning pedagogy into public affairs programs. The article begins with an analysis of a bibliographic database of service-related research published between 1990 and 1999. Although little of the research focuses specifically on public affairs programs, it is a rich literature that proposes best practices, examines program outcomes, and identifies factors thought to influence the successful implementation of service learning. We build on this analysis by reviewing studies of service learning in public affairs published after 1999 to craft seven design principles: explicit connections between the service activity and learning objectives; reflection; appropriate time commitment; student input; faculty commitment; perceptible impacts; and feedback loops. Our hope is that the design principles provide guidance to those wishing to employ a service learning pedagogy and that subsequent research will test, refine, and expand them in ways that improve the likelihood that these experiences will produce desired learning objectives.

Service learning is becoming an integral part of higher education curricula in the United States. Accordingly, in higher education it is common to find a wide range of service learning opportunities available to students in professional education pro-

grams. Students regularly participate in activities ranging from providing literacy tutoring, helping the aging population, mentoring youth, working in community development programs, improving the environment, or serving in community programs. These activities occur in both classroom and co- or extra-curricular settings.

The literature contains a wide variety of operational definitions of service learning, but common characteristics include:

- it is primarily a pedagogical approach that uses instructional methods that promote learning through active participation in organized experiences that meet actual community needs;
- it is integrated into the academic curriculum;
- it provides students with an opportunity to use their skills and academic knowledge in real-life situations; and
- it promotes a sense of caring for others (Killian 2004; Reinke 2003).

We follow Barbara Jacoby (2003, 3) and view service learning as "a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development. Reflection and reciprocity are key concepts of service learning."

Increased emphasis on service learning is part of the expanded role that service-related activities have played as a problem-solving instrument in American society since the passage of the National and Community Service Act of 1990. It is also easy to understand why there is growing support for incorporating service learning into the curricula of public affairs programs. Undergraduate and graduate students in public affairs programs are increasingly taking advantage of national service programs such as AmeriCorps to gain job-related experience and pay for their education. Service learning also encourages interaction between students, the public, and community agencies (Dicke, Doden, and Torres, 2004). Thus, courses focused on such things as civic engagement, policy analysis, community development, leadership, public and nonprofit management, program evaluation, and government service delivery provide fertile ground for using a service learning pedagogy to achieve learning objectives (e.g., Killian, 2004; Whitaker and Berner, 2004; Berstein, Ohren, and Shue, 2003; Reinke 2003; Bushouse and Morrison, 2001; Jelier and Clarke, 1999).

Given that service learning is used in a wide range of disciplines and there are a wide range of possible learning objectives, it is not surprising that the literature provides a range of rationales or perspectives on its use. For example, Dicke and others (2004) identified four common perspectives for using the service-learning pedagogy in public affairs programs:

- Community service perspective: service learning provides a way to incorporate meaningful community service into the curriculum to develop a sense of civic responsibility while developing academic skills;

- Moral development perspective: service learning provides a means for faculty to develop socialization experiences that promote moral and ethical development;
- Political activism perspective: service learning provides a means of promoting social justice and helps combat public apathy, distrust, and contempt toward government; and,
- Instrumental perspective: service learning should be evaluated solely on its effectiveness as an educational tool (Dicke, Doden, and Torres, 2004).

Some of these perspectives are potentially controversial, such as when service learning is instituted for the purpose of moral development or political activism. Others are less so when the focus is on developing academic or professional skills while serving. In either case, what is clear is that each perspective emphasizes vastly different learning objectives and that the effectiveness of a service learning program should be defined in terms of its ability to achieve the desired learning objective.

It is not the intention of this article to critique the merits of these competing perspectives or to argue that one particular set of outcomes or learning objectives is most appropriate. Rather, this paper focuses on identifying elements of program design that can improve the effectiveness of service learning programs regardless of the perspective employed. We do so by drawing attention to the increase in the scholarly and professional service learning literature found in a variety of academic disciplines. This literature is used to suggest design principles that can be used to help implement a service learning pedagogy in public affairs programs. Much of this literature is theoretically based, but it is also informative to practitioners. In this way, the emerging scholarship on service learning helps to fill the gap between the ivory tower side of academia and the concern that many scholars in the social sciences have for addressing important societal and community needs. All of this points to the fact that there is a rich literature from a variety of disciplines that helps inform our understanding of the role service learning can play in public affairs programs.

The objective of this article is to present design principles that can be used to guide the incorporation of a service learning pedagogy into public affairs programs, regardless of one's perspective on its use. Some of our design principles represent best practices that are widely discussed in the literature, such as the importance of reflection (Bringle and Hatcher, 1996; Hatcher and Bringle, 1997). Other principles identify critical program design issues such as the intensity or appropriate amount of time that should be devoted to the service activity. However, the research is unclear on how much contact is necessary. In either case, the design principles represent important avenues for future research.

We begin the paper by examining the growing research on citizen service since the adoption of national service legislation in 1990, in order to improve our

understanding of the factors that influence the effectiveness of service learning in public affairs programs. This involved drawing generalizations about the field of citizen service based primarily on an analysis of a bibliographic database of service-related research published between 1990 and 1999 (Perry and Imperial, 2001; Perry and Katula, 2001; Perry et al., 1999). While little of this research focuses on public affairs programs, it is a rich literature that proposes best practices, examines program outcomes, and identifies factors thought to influence the successful implementation of service learning. The second part of the paper builds on this analysis by using a review of studies of service learning in public affairs programs published after 1999 combined with the authors' personal experiences to craft a set of design principles that can be used to guide the use of a service-learning pedagogy in public affairs curricula. Our hope is that the design principles provide guidance to those wishing to employ a service learning pedagogy and that subsequent research will test, refine, and expand them in ways that improve the likelihood that these experiences produce desired learning objectives.

Developing the Database

The first step in crafting design principles involved reviewing a bibliographic database developed under the auspices of the Research Task Force of the Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service as part of a larger research project on citizen service.[1] The database was constructed by searching nine databases using a variety of search terms related to citizen service, service learning, and service-related activities for the period 1990–1999. Given the different terminology used in academic disciplines, our strategy was to cast a wide net. The databases searched were Academic Search Elite; Book Where; Dissertation Abstracts International; ERIC (Education); Government Documents; PAIS (Public Affairs); IPSA (International Political Science Abstracts); SocioFile (Sociology); and PsycINFO (Psychology). The product of these searches was a series of bibliographic records. We examined the individual database searches in order to remove unwanted records, such as references that included search terms but did not involve studies of citizen service. We then merged the individual searches into one database and duplicate records were removed. The remaining abstracts were coded and labeled with key words to facilitate searching the database. The result was a database containing 2,558 bibliographic records and abstracts of service-related research published between 1990 and 1999 (Perry et al., 1999).

The next step involved a further review of the database to identify records that were research oriented. This was done by examining such things as whether the study employed standard social science research methods, used quasi-experimental designs, developed conceptual or theoretical frameworks, or tested hypotheses. This produced a smaller database containing 997 records.[2] From this subset of records, we identified 236 entries involving service-learning research focused on education at all levels.[3] Because we were only interested in service-learning as

practiced in higher education, a subsequent sort reduced the database to a total of 102 records. These database entries were then systematically coded and analyzed using procedures recommended in the literature (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

LESSONS FROM THE SERVICE-LEARNING LITERATURE

We learned a great deal by analyzing the abstracts in the larger database, and many of these findings are discussed in greater detail elsewhere (e.g., Perry and Imperial, 2001; Perry and Katula, 2001; Perry et al., 1999). Service-related research is found in a wide variety of academic disciplines and professional fields, including education, political science, public affairs, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and business. Unfortunately, there appear to be few cross-disciplinary attempts to synthesize this literature. It also appears that the work by researchers in one discipline is often neglected by those in other disciplines (Perry and Imperial, 2001).

Our detailed analysis of the subset of the larger database, focused on service-learning in higher education, also produced interesting findings. When we focused on the "service" component of these studies, we found that 59, or approximately 58 percent, involved some aspect of community service, 18 involved some type of volunteer activity (mostly in tutoring, mentoring, and literacy programs), and 11 involved working in primary or secondary education. Other policy areas where "service" was located involved programs dealing with community development (9), intergenerational or aging populations (8), character education (5), human needs such as poverty (4), and the environment (4). Accordingly, although only five studies specifically examined the use of service learning in public affairs courses, the literature clearly illustrates that this pedagogy has been used in a wide range of policy contexts.

Of specific interest to this study was the service-learning research focused on identifying best practices, program outcomes, or factors that influenced program effectiveness. After coding the 102 bibliographic records in our database, we found that 30 consisted primarily of descriptive case studies or other types of studies that did not focus specifically on best practices, outcomes, or factors influencing effectiveness. The discussion that follows is based primarily on the examination of the remaining 72 records that consisted of case studies focused on identifying best practices (11, or 15.3 percent), survey research involving students (17, or 23.6 percent), faculty (6, or 8.3 percent), service providers (4, or 5.5 percent), or program evaluations (27, or 37.5 percent), many of which employed quasi-experimental research designs (14, or 19.4 percent).

Table 1 illustrates the wide range of outcomes or learning objectives that researchers have examined. They also reflect many of the competing perspectives of service learning observed by Dicke and others (2004). In 19 studies, the specific learning objective was hard to determine or the outcome used was vague, like "make a difference." The most common learning objective (17 studies) was to change the attitudes of the service participant. These were wide ranging, such as

the understanding of some social problem or attitudes toward diversity, racism, or the elderly. Twelve studies examined whether the service participant had a sense of increased civic engagement, while eight looked at changes in attitudes toward service or a general future commitment to volunteering. Five studies examined character development, and two looked at changes in empathy. Seven studies focused specifically on academic achievement and whether participation in service-learning led to higher grades. Another common set of outcomes focused on the development of various skills such as problem solving (4), communication (3), interpersonal (2), leadership (2), or organizational (1). Others examined cognitive dimensions (6), personal development (4), and self-esteem (2). Some of the studies also examined the impact of service-learning programs on faculty (2), their institution (2), and the community (5).

Measuring the impact of program characteristics on the service-learning experience is a more difficult proposition. Many studies produced mixed results. For example, a comprehensive study by the RAND Corporation found that participation in a service-learning course had only modest effects on students' civic participation and life skills and no effect on their academic and career development. On the other hand, RAND found that participation in service learning was positively associated with gains in students' civic and interpersonal skills and that the quality of the course made a big difference in the results (Gray et al., 2000, 39). It also observed no negative effects associated with participation, whereas other researchers have noted instances in which service led to negative outcomes (Marks, 1994; Blyth, Saito, and Berkas, 1997).

Further complicating matters is the fact that little of the research in the database focuses specifically on linking elements of program design to changes in outcomes. Instead, the research tends to identify factors that appear to influence program outcomes or help explain the presence or absence of desired findings. While the best practice

Table 1. Outcomes Examined in Service-Learning Programs (No. of Studies)

Used a vague measure (19)
Academic achievement (7)
Attitudes toward service (8)
Attitudes toward some sort of social problem or issue (17)
Civic engagement (12)
Cognitive dimensions (usually associated with a specific learning model) (6)
Communication skills (3)
Empathy (2)
Interpersonal skills (2)
Job placement and development (1)
Leadership skills (2)
Miscellaneous skills (3)
Moral development and values (5)
Organizational skills (1)
Personal development (4)
Problem solving (4)
Self-esteem (2)
Community (5)
Faculty (2)
Institution (2)

research in our database does focus specifically on identifying design factors, it tends to rely on case studies rather than using research methods with greater generalizability (e.g., quasi-experimental designs). Perhaps more troubling is the fact that only two studies focused on older students at the graduate level. It is unclear to what extent the findings reported for undergraduates will hold for graduate students (Reinke, 2003).

Although there is clearly much that remains to be learned about using the service learning pedagogy in public affairs programs, the database does provide some clues about factors that affect the implementation of service learning programs. Table 2 indicates the wide range of critical factors or design principles identified in our review of the database. Some of the factors were identified as "best practices" while others represent factors that modified the success in achieving outcomes. It is clear from even a casual review of the factors in Table 2 that the list of potential factors is far from complete. The following section proposes a series of design principles based on our review of the database. Where research is lacking, we rely on our collective experiences with incorporating service learning into public affairs courses to craft design principles. Some design principles are obvious and represent best practices

Table 2. Design Factors Influencing Outcomes and Best Practices Identified (No. of Studies)

Age of students participating (1)

Amount of agency supervision (agency sponsoring server) (1)

Amount of contact (e.g., hours served) (9)

Class size (presumably related to faculty supervision) (1)

Faculty motivation (often used to explain why pedagogy is used) (5)

Importance of planning and designing service component (2)

Institutional support (often used to explain why pedagogy is used) (9)

Paid vs. unpaid service activities (1)

Partnership with the service providers (2)

Quality of the student placement (1)

Reflection—General importance (4)

Reflection—Journals (11)

Reflection—Class discussion (2)

Reflection—Student paper/project (2)

Reflection—Progress reports (1)

Reflection—Focus groups (1)

Relationship student has with faculty member (1)

Risk management concerns (often used to explain why pedagogy is used) (1)

Service is linked to learning objectives (9)

Student involvement in planning service activities (2)

Student preparation for service projects (1)

Student supervision by faculty member (4)

Students perceive they are making a difference (1)

Students perceive the link to the course material (1)

Students help set learning goals (1)

advocated in the service-learning literature. Others represent important program design questions that have received far less attention in the literature.

Design Principles for Effective Service Learning

Professional schools often focus on creating a variety of experiential learning opportunities for their students (Whitaker and Berner, 2004; Bringle and Hatcher, 1996). In public affairs programs, the service learning pedagogy has been incorporated into the curriculum in various ways such as through internships (stipended or nonstipended) (Bringel and Hatcher, 1996), some form of project-based classroom experience (Killian, 2004; Whitaker and Berner, 2004; Bernstein, Ohren, and Shue, 2003; Bushouse and Morrison, 2001; Jelier and Clarke, 1999), or capstone classes involving applied service projects (McGaw and Weschler, 1999). It is important to acknowledge that internships, class service projects, capstone classes, or other volunteer experiences associated with a public affairs program are not inherently service learning. Service learning is a pedagogy that involves explicitly linking a service activity to learning objectives and course material through reflection. Moreover, unlike internships, class projects, and practica, service learning is not necessarily skill-based as is often the case in professional education (Bringle and Hatcher, 1996).

Effective service learning depends on establishing clear learning objectives for the service activity, an effective program design, and then using appropriate evaluation tools to assess student learning (Dicke, Doden, and Torres, 2004, 200–201). In this section, we propose seven interrelated principles for designing effective service-learning programs. These include (1) explicit connections between service activity and the learning objective(s); (2) reflection; (3) appropriate time commitment or amount of contact; (4) student input; (5) faculty commitment; (6) perceptible impacts of the service activity; and (7) feedback loops. Some design principles, such as student input, precede others, such as reflection. Others principles such as perceptible impacts, reflection, and amount of contact with the service activity moderate the success of the service and learning components of a service learning experience. The design principles are also inherently linked by feedback processes. Like traditional models of experiential learning, in which theory is informed by experiences that, in turn, produce changes in the learner and the cycle is repeated again, we view the service-learning experience as an iterative process (Kolb, 1984).

Explicit Connections Between the Service and Learning Objectives of an Activity

Nine studies in the database identified the linkage of the service and learning objectives as being a critical factor in achieving desired program outcomes. This should not be surprising. As Tai-Seale noted, "Service learning is not synonymous with service—even if reflection and reciprocity are added. The service must be linked to learning objectives in the curriculum (2001, 14–15)." Moreover, as Dicke and others (2004, 199) argue, the "benefits of service learning pedagogy do

not occur just when a community-based project is added to a syllabus.... Successful service learning projects are designed with clear learning objectives in mind; without these objectives, the pedagogy can be a time-consuming and ineffective instructional tool." As noted earlier, instructors can have vastly different learning objectives based on their perspective of service learning and the course in question. Thus, the issue is not whether students are learning, but what it is that students are expected to learn and whether they are in fact learning it (Dicke, Dowden, and Torres, 2004, 201). Thus, the service activity should be designed to help students to gain further insight into principles or substantive issues that they are studying in the classroom (Kirlin, 2002; Rocha, 2000).

Several recent studies in public affairs programs have noted the importance of linking the service activity to learning objectives (e.g., Dicke, Dowden, and Torres, 2004; Bushouse and Morrison, 2001). What these studies suggest is that there are advantages to having explicit connections between service in the field and learning in the classroom. For example, students enrolled in a course on social justice served in a soup kitchen on four different occasions. The students returned to the classroom, where they reflected upon their experiences through a series of assignments that connected the service they had performed with substantive issues they were studying. Survey research showed that the students began thinking about social responsibility and their ability to cause social change (Yates and Youniss, 1998).

In another example connecting service with learning, college students enrolled in a course titled "Contemporary Political Issues" completed a questionnaire at the beginning and end of the course. Two of the eight sections of the course included a service component. Students in the service sections completed 20 hours of service at designated agencies during the semester. The authors found that participants

- were more likely to believe they had performed up to their potential in the class;
- finished the course with higher class attendance rates;
- achieved higher grades in the course; and
- gained/learned more from the class than students in the sections that did not include service components (Markus, Howard, and King, 1993).

The Active Citizenship Today program is another good example that illustrates the benefits of connecting student involvement in the community with academic skills and addressing public problems. Through integrating service with classroom experience, participants in the program

- experienced an increased sense of belonging to their community;
- experienced increased self-esteem and problem-solving capabilities;
- scored higher on civic participation attitudes; and
- experienced a more positive attitude toward school, community, family, and friends (Ford, 1995).

Such results demonstrate why establishing explicit connections between service and learning is important. Explicit connections are fostered by building them into the service-learning experience, using student reflection and other methods. In addition, variations in student input, time on task, and incorporating feedback from students will also affect the way in which service experiences can be usefully connected with learning. What this suggests for public affairs programs is that service learning involves more than simply adding a requirement such as serving with an agency or doing an applied community-based project.

Reflection

Reflection is a critical component of any effective service learning program (Hatcher and Bringle, 1997). Our analysis of the database supports this conclusion with numerous studies identifying reflection as either a best practice or as a critical factor in determining whether outcomes were achieved. It is also clear that reflection comes in a many forms, with a variety of studies examining the effectiveness of journals (11), class discussion (2), student papers or projects (2), progress reports (1), and focus groups (1). Similarly, the service learning literature on public affairs programs has noted the importance of reflection and the use of techniques such as journals and essays (Koliba, 2004; Whitaker and Berner, 2004; Dede, 2002; Bushouse and Morrison, 2001; McGaw and Weschler, 1999). The value of reflection is also well accepted within public affairs programs as illustrated in the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) internship guidelines (http://www.naspaa.org/principals/resources/internship.asp), which call for an academic seminar to strengthen learning from internships. Reflection is also frequently a part of capstone or project-based classes.

Reflection allows students and their instructors to consider the service in which the students have engaged and to connect the service experience with course material and with larger issues such as citizenship, ethics, and civic responsibility. The primary purpose of reflection is to provide meaning and context to the service students have provided. However, reflection can also help the instructor to pursue academic goals within a service-learning course. Reflection assignments can integrate concepts from the course with student experiences. Some of the positive effects that are frequently cited include

- enhancing the quality of student/faculty relationships;
- an increased ability to identify important social issues and to gauge the consequences of one's actions; and
- valuing the potential of assuming leadership roles in one's future.

This suggests that the positive benefits of reflective activities are not limited to students, but can also have positive effects on the development of student-faculty interactions (Eyler, Giles, and Braxton, 1997). Within the graduate public affairs

arena, the reflection accompanying service learning differentiates it from traditional client-based practicum experiences, and Bushouse and Morrison (2001) believe it improves the overall MPA experience.

Various types of reflection may be used individually or they may be combined (Hatcher and Bringle, 1997). Reflection can also take a variety of written or oral forms. Students may keep journals of what they did during their service activities. They may also write papers that discuss their service experience along with other related issues. Seminar courses may require that students reflect on their experiences by gathering for discussion groups with each other and their instructors. For example, students in a philosophy course with a service component volunteered for 15 hours of service, maintained a journal, and wrote a four-page reflection journal that integrated their service experience with the course material. Students also reflected upon their experiences through interviews (Fenzel and Leary, 1997). Thus, reflection is a critical means of helping students understand the significance of the service in which they participated and helps reinforce the learning objectives addressed during the service experience.

Hatcher and Bringle (1997) provide some useful guidelines for developing effective reflection activities. They suggest that effective reflection activities: (1) link the experience to the learning objective; (2) provide guidance for the reflection activity; (3) schedule the activities regularly; (4) allow for feedback and assessment; and, (5) includes a clarification of values. Moreover, while each method of reflecting upon one's service may work well when used individually, we suggest using a combination of reflection activities, because written reflection is quite different from verbal group reflection. The former allows the student to explore personal experiences, and the latter permits students to learn from their peers' experiences. Students also learn and process information in different ways, so using multiple techniques may improve the learning component of the service-learning project. One way of combining these methods is to have students keep a journal or write a statement about their service. Although this allows the student to reflect in an inward-looking manner, we also believe that students should share and discuss these statements with their colleagues. This will allow students to also reflect interpersonally by comparing experiences and viewpoints on the service they have performed.

One more note on reflection is in order. Very few studies, if any, have focused on appropriate levels of reflection within service-learning programs. However, reflection is not a practice that should be reserved until the end of a service experience. Instead, in long-term service projects, which may last, for example, over the course of a semester, reflection can and should occur often (Hatcher and Bringle, 1997).

Appropriate Time Commitment

Nine studies in the database examined the extent to which the amount of time spent on the service activity influenced the effectiveness of service learning

programs. Of particular interest is whether there is some minimum or maximum amount of time or contact that students should spend on a service project? Research results on this topic are worth reviewing.

In a study of students' effectiveness as citizens, time had a positive and significant effect for students engaging in community-based service activities. However, this was the case as long as the amount of service did not exceed one or two hours weekly. Generally speaking, the study concludes that levels of citizen efficacy rise with the amount of time spent on service, but that this trend is not linear. The author concludes that if high schools sponsor service programs, a learning component and support structure should be included, as required service without these elements negatively affects students' citizen efficacy (Marks, 1994).

One or two hours weekly might not seem like much time to engage in service. In another study that gauged service-learning effects on suburban high school seniors involved in community service, time played quite a different role than in the previous study cited. The author found no difference between attitudes toward the personal and social responsibility of students participating in a required 10 hours of community service and students not participating. However, students involved in required community service for more than 10 hours demonstrated a positive change in attitude toward personal and social responsibility (Williams, 1993).

In short, the complexity of the social world makes it difficult to gauge how many hours of service are appropriate for a given project. The key variables of any service project are likely to differ to a high enough degree to make devising an *ex ante* number of hours for service very difficult, if not impossible. In short, no obvious formula exists for arriving at the appropriate number of service hours. Instead, the designers of service learning will have to rely to a large extent on their knowledge of the attributes of the server, the attributes of the service activity, and the population to be served to make these experiences beneficial to the server and to the served (Perry and Imperial, 2001).

Although the specifics may vary from context to context, we believe that allocating appropriate time to the service activity is vital. By this we mean that students must spend enough time in a particular service activity to develop an understanding of the problem, appreciate their role in the service activity, and create a sense of ownership of the task they are to accomplish while serving. This can help to maximize the benefits derived from the service learning experience.

The issue of time spent on service remains one of the more troublesome in the field of service learning. The preceding results cast doubt on service-learning programs that mandate a particular number of hours per student, regardless of the nature of the task. This discussion does suggest, however, that designers of service-learning programs who take local and specific conditions into consideration when formulating service-learning programs are acting appropriately.

For incorporating service learning into public affairs programs, a 20-hour-per-week internship over the course of a semester or summer is probably sufficient time to achieve many of the goals that are typically established for internships. A semester-length project-based or capstone class is also probably an adequate period provided that the project is of sufficient complexity to demand more than an hour or two of a student's time each week (Jelier and Clarke, 1999). Conversely, intensive capstone or project-based classes held over a two- or three-week period during an intercession or following a semester may allow adequate time for a service project, but may provide insufficient time for reflection.

Student Input

Experiential learning is particularly important for adults, because faculty members "assume that students are motivated to learn by their own values, including their professional and public service goals, rather than by grades or other extrinsic rewards supplied by professors" (Whitaker and Berner, 2004, 280). Accordingly, it is reasonable to assume that levels of interest and dedication in service learning will rise when the student servers have a voice in designing the nature of their service. Student input may also increase motivation and the likelihood that the learning objectives associated with the service project are readily understood and met. Two studies in the database suggest that student involvement in planning activities can influence the effectiveness of service learning programs. Another study suggests that student involvement in setting learning objectives can improve program performance. Recent literature also yields evidence that student input increases the quality of service projects (e.g., Morgan and Streb, 2000; Miller, 1997).

Let us illustrate how student involvement can be incorporated into service learning courses, using as examples internships and projects, the two most common modes for service learning in public affairs programs. Internships are probably the most common vehicle through which students in public affairs programs engage in service learning. Well-designed internships yield multiple benefits. Agencies receive skilled and inexpensive staff. Students build skills through real-world experience. This experience and the networking opportunities it affords can also help students to land jobs in the area they desire or can facilitate their transition to a new profession. The experience that students derive is not only an investment in their professional futures, but also allows them added insight when they return to the classroom (Denhardt, Lewis, Raffel, and Rich, 1997). Many public affairs programs have internships built into their degree requirements. Some are paid a nominal wage; others are unpaid.[4] If students are going to serve as interns then they should be allowed some input in choosing where to serve. For example, students interested in a career in environmental regulation should be allowed the opportunity to serve in an agency engaged in the formulation or

implementation of environmental policy, in contrast to being assigned to a social service agency to simply satisfy a requirement.

A program leader can require that students study various agencies before choosing one in which to serve. Conducting such research allows students to determine if the activities of the agency fit their own interests and whether the experience and skills that they bring to the service experience will benefit the agency. This provides for a better overall match between the student and the agency. In the case of paid internships, students may even have to compete against other students for prized internships, which also should improve their motivation to do well and succeed.

Furthermore, there is an added benefit to having students study agencies before serving in them. Weaving student input into internship programs prepares students for the job search. The two processes can be very similar, because in both cases the student tries to capitalize on personal interests and skills as much as possible in finding a place to begin his or her career. The internship may also provide contacts that facilitate the job search.

Project-based courses can also be managed to provide opportunities for student input into the content of the project. This input is important because it provides students with a greater reason to care about the project and see its goals to fruition. It can also be designed to produce work products that enhance the students' professional portfolio. For example, courses can be designed around local problems. In this case, the professor can try to match students with problems of interest to them and then supply students with information on local problems and agencies. Students can then study the problem and seek to remedy it through a responsible local agency or organization. Students can also work on projects that produce work products that are then presented to a client agency. Aside from producing a work product that can enhance a student's professional portfolio, this type of experience can help simulate professional expectations and generate peer pressure for group members to produce high-quality work products.

In addition to these two structured ideas, students and professors can collaborate on a one-on-one basis, with the student designing the research and service to be undertaken. The professor can help to hone the focus of the project and to ensure that it is feasible, given local conditions. Another means for student input is to have them design a contract—signed by the student, the agency, and the faculty supervisor—that articulates roles, responsibilities, and learning objectives associated with the service activity.

FACULTY COMMITMENT

Institutional support, and most importantly faculty commitment, are important to the success of a service learning pedagogy. Nine studies in the database identify institutional support (e.g., funding, training, commitment from administrators and college leaders) as a variable to explain why faculty chose to incorporate service learning into the curriculum. More important is a faculty commit-

ment to using the service learning pedagogy. The database identifies a range of potential variables associated with the level of faculty commitment, including faculty motivation (5 studies), importance of planning the service activity (2), developing an effective partnership with service providers (2), proper preparation of students for service projects (1), student supervision during the service project (4), and ensuring that agency sponsors provide adequate supervision (1).

The recent literature on service learning in public affairs programs provides similar observations. Faculty commitment to the service learning pedagogy is important because academic courses that engage the community require more extensive preparation by instructors (Tai-Seale, 2001; Jelier and Clarke, 1999). For example, instructors must specify learning objectives and link them to service activities, develop effective partnerships with service providers, provide information about the community being served and the nature of the service, ensure that students are properly trained for the work that must be done, and regularly provide feedback on reflection activities to ensure that the learning objectives are being met.

Of equal interest here are the reasons why some faculty find the service learning pedagogy intimidating to use. These include faculty not having the time to develop new course modules; not having the necessary contacts with community agencies; lacking the expertise across all areas of potential service learning projects; feeling isolated and alone when doing service learning projects; and lacking the resources (financial or otherwise) for such a project (Bernstein, Ohren, and Shue, 2003). Because the service learning pedagogy can be intimidating to use, having appropriate institutional support is important for it to flourish (Langseth and Plater, 2004).

Perceptible Impacts

A number of the factors identified in our analysis of the database suggest the importance of perceptible impacts or results of the service activity (Table 2). Such impacts might make it easier to develop effective partnerships between educators and agencies, increase the likelihood that agency sponsors provide adequate supervision for students, and lead faculty to see the benefits of using a service learning pedagogy as outweighing costs. Similarly, it may make their host institutions (e.g., colleges, departments) more likely to provide the support necessary for faculty to use the pedagogy.

Perhaps most important is that students can see the effects of the service activity and recognize the connection to the course material and learning objectives. In order for students to feel that they have really made a contribution by serving, we believe that the impact of their work must be perceptible to them on some level. For example, students interns should, by the end of their internship, feel that the time they have spent has contributed to some positive outcome. While this conclusion seems clear enough, designers of service learning programs often struggle with achieving this end.

Service learning activities that involve community development make good use of this idea. In the Neighborhoods 2000 program, youths 21 years old and younger were brought together with community members 60 years old or older (Blyth, Saito, and Berkas, 1997). Benefits of the program included

- eradicating age-related stereotypes;
- developing a sense of camaraderie between participants;
- enhancing a sense of citizen responsibility and community activism; and
- conveying a sense of cultural continuity.

There is also evidence that direct interaction between students and those served has effects that extend beyond the close of the initial service-learning experience. Youth in service-learning programs who got to know those they were helping reported that they were more likely to serve others in the future than youth who did not get to know those they were helping. In addition, other scholars have reported that one of the major reasons why students voluntarily engage in service learning is the motivation to help other people. There is also evidence that such altruistic behavior is passed intergenerationally (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995). This altruistic impulse suggests that outcomes that affect others should be built into the goal structure of service-learning programs. However, this does not mean that students performing service must work face-to-face with those benefiting from their service. For example, neighborhood clean-ups or work in parks can also yield direct, tangible benefits to others, without face-to-face interaction with residents (Astin and Sax, 1998).

Another example of establishing perceptible impacts from service comes from the University of Colorado, Denver (Robinson, 2000). Students enrolled in the "Urban Citizen" course engage in both physical service and also community organization and political agitation for fair housing standards in Denver. These service experiences accompany seminars dealing with issues of urban poverty and community development. The course has been so successful that in 1998 the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded a grant to the university to establish a community organizing and research center (http://thunder1.cudenver.edu/polisci/community.html). The message that the Urban Citizen course conveys to students is clear—that working for the good of the community can yield very tangible benefits.

This research offers some guidance in ensuring that service-learning experiences in public affairs programs have perceptible impacts. The service that students provide should have some potential to yield change that is visible or perceptible to the students taking part in the service activity. We use the word potential because in most situations change will be dependent upon a variety of variables, not just student service. Thus, the absence of an impact does not necessarily negate a possible learning experience. In fact, the failure to have an impact could provide important learning opportunities, related, for example, to lessons about bureau-

cracy, how regulatory systems function and work in practice, or other fundamental aspects of public affairs.

Research also provides guidance for designing internships with a service-learning component. What is important is that students are placed in a position within a sponsoring institution that allows them an opportunity to make a difference. Accordingly, internships should be carefully designed so that a student is more than simply a part-time worker logging a certain number of hours per week in an organization. Instead, the student should be working on a meaningful project that can be completed during the prescribed timeframe, or at least is completed before they graduate from a program. Alternatively, they could be involved in providing information to decision makers and have an opportunity to witness what happens with this information. For a project-based class, it is important to design projects that can be completed in the specified period of time (for example, one semester). It also may be beneficial to incorporate projects for real clients so that the students have an opportunity to witness what is done with the results of their analysis.

Feedback Loops

The last design principle is a concept borrowed from teaching methodology. Feedback mechanisms should be established throughout the service-learning course to help students, instructors, and the agencies or individuals to be served achieve the optimum benefit from the experience. Recent literature on service learning in public affairs has noted the importance of providing feedback to students from faculty and their agency sponsors (e.g., Whitaker and Berner, 2004; Bushouse and Morrison, 2001). Moreover, the literature on reflective activities (e.g., journals, class discussion, papers, etc.) in the database as well as in recent public affairs literature also argues that feedback is important (Koliba, 2004; Dede, 2002; Hatcher and Bringle, 1997).

Feedback can be solicited from students, clients (those being served), agency sponsors, and faculty at any point during the service experience. For example, feedback about interns can be solicited from sponsoring institutions. Classes using community-based projects can solicit from client agencies feedback that is shared with the students in the class (Whitaker and Berner, 2004). The substance of the feedback will vary. From a faculty standpoint, they should be concerned with whether the learning objectives are being met. Students should also be allowed to offer feedback to the instructor during the course and presumably will evaluate the service-learning experience through a formal process after the course has ended. Suggestions offered in these evaluations should be used to improve future versions of the service-learning course. Alternatively, it is important that students receive the feedback and direction necessary to ensure that the learning objectives are met.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although all the design principles are connected at a general level, some of these relationships are worth examining in future research to better understand their interrelationships and how they mediate the success of a service-learning activity. This could lead to additional design principles that would further enhance the effectiveness of service learning in the public affairs curriculum.

Student input appears to be closely tied to perceptible impacts. We draw this conclusion because the instructor, after considering input from students, must be able to gauge whether or not the service project will actually have potential impacts that are perceptible to the student. In this sense, the instructor acts as a regulator, allowing students as much leeway as possible in offering input into the design of the service project, but also making sure that the project will yield the desired results. Accordingly, it is worth improving our understanding of the relationship between student input, the presence of perceptible impacts, and the effectiveness of a service-learning experience.

Time devoted to a service-learning activity also appears to be related to perceptible impacts and the effectiveness of these activities. As noted earlier, the appropriate length of time devoted to service learning is debatable, but it appears that some nontrivial commitment of time to service may be critical for the success of a service-learning experience. While the amount of time required to achieve the learning objectives is unclear, an improved understanding of relationships among time devoted, perceptible impacts, and other design factors should improve the design of service learning programs.

There also appears to be a strong relationship between the quality of reflection —and therefore the quality of the overall service-learning experience—and designing an activity with perceptible impacts. As Zlotkowski (1995, 125) warns, reflection can too often amount to little more than student "discovering" a predetermined ideologically correct interpretation of the service experience. Reflection becomes more meaningful when students can readily see the point of their service activity and the connection between service and concepts studied in the classroom (or other learning objectives) is readily identifiable. The same is true of perceptible impacts. When students can witness the results of their service, their reflective activities are more likely to instill in them a sense of purpose and accomplishment. Accordingly, additional research on these interrelationships is likely to lead to additional design principles that can enhance service learning in public affairs programs.

Lastly, feedback loops tie into all of the design principles. Through steady interaction between students and the instructor, the various components of a service-learning experience can be adjusted to optimize the benefits to both the students and the agency or individuals served. While feedback loops are often advanced within the field of education, there is little research examining these

feedback processes and thus little guidance on how they can be used to enhance service learning in public affairs programs.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Developing design principles for effective service learning will become easier as time passes. Results that look less at the theoretical underpinnings of service learning and more at the actual results of various types of programs are increasing in number, and with the accumulation of information on specific programs more effective generalizations become possible. However, for the time being, some relatively safe bets can be made in designing a service-learning program. What follows might be considered a preliminary checklist of design principles and recommendations for developing an effective service-learning activity:

- Explicit connections between the service being performed and facts, principles, or ideas being studied and discussed in the classroom;
- Reflection that allows students to gain a better understanding of what they have done through service, why they have done it, and how their acts of service might relate to broader concepts of citizenship, morality, and public responsibility;
- An appropriate time commitment that should neither sour the student on the idea of service nor make the act seem trivial, but provides enough time to develop a sense of ownership of the task they are trying to accomplish and reflect on the meaning of the work;
- Student input that takes into consideration the nature of the service to be performed, how this service will be performed, and the goals of this service;
- Faculty commitment to doing what is required to use a service learning pedagogy;
- Perceptible impacts between inputs into the service and outputs as a result of the service that allows students, faculty, and agency sponsors to see the fruits of their labor;
- Feedback loops that allow the various parties to offer input on the service project throughout its course of completion.

There are clearly many ways to incorporate service-learning activities into a public affairs curriculum using these design principles. Internships, community-based projects, and capstone classes are common in many public affairs programs and provide important experiential learning opportunities that can use a service-learning pedagogy to enhance student learning. Service learning is a valuable addition to the curriculum because it enriches the academic experience while developing professional skills that potentially enhance both the employability and civic responsibility of students.

NOTES

1. For more information on the construction of the database and its contents, see Grantmaker Forum on Community & National Service, 2000; Perry and Imperial, 2001; and Perry et al., 1999. The products of this research project include Grantmaker Forum on Community & National Service, 2000; Perry and Imperial, 2001; Perry and Katula, 2001; and Perry et al., 1999.

2. The largest number of records, 475, or 48 % of the total, are journal or periodical articles. Although many of these records are peer-reviewed, and therefore met one quality threshold, we were unable to code individual articles for the presence/absence of this attribute. The status of a journal as peer reviewed masks the fact that some articles appearing in peer-reviewed journals may not have been subjected to peer review. At the same time, some journals that are peer reviewed may have high acceptance rates, suggesting that peer review, by itself, is not a highly reliable indicator of quality. The second most frequent type of publication in the database is dissertations. The 194 dissertations in the database represent 20% of the total. The next most frequent type of publication is nongovernmental organization documents, encompassing 18% of the total.

3. The 236 records devoted to service-learning overstate the volume of relevant research from which we were able to draw. For example, only 102 of the 236 service-learning records in the database were focused on higher education. Many of the other studies looked at kindergarten through 12th grade.

4. There is some debate in the service-learning literature about whether a stipended activity can be considered service. Rather than take sides in this debate, we adopted a broad view of the service-related literature and recognized that service at times can include stipended activities.

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Mark T. Imperial is an assistant professor in the master of public administration program at the University of North Carolina–Wilmington, where he teaches courses in public management, policy analysis, and environmental policy and management. His research has been published in various journals including *Administration & Society, Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, Public Works Management and Policy, Natural Resources Journal,* and *Environmental Management.*

James L. Perry is Chancellor's Professor, School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA), and Senior Scholar in the Center for Service and Learning at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI). He also directs the Indiana University American Democracy Project. His research focuses on public service motivation, community and national service, and government reform and appears in such journals as *Administrative Science Quarterly, Administration and Society, Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly,* and *Public Administration Review.* His most recent book is *Civic Service: What Difference Does It Make?* (M. E. Sharpe, 2004).

Michael C. Katula is a doctoral candidate in the joint Ph.D. program in public policy at Indiana University, Bloomington. He received his M.A. degree from the Russian and East European Institute at Indiana University, Bloomington, and his B.A. degree from DePaul University. His research interests include local government reform and social capital.