



## CHAPTER TWELVE

# TRIANGULATED LEARNING

## Integrating Text, Current Events, and Experience in State and Local Government

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This chapter is based on my more than fifteen years of experience using elements of the service-learning pedagogy in the social sciences generally, and a course in state and local government in particular. Beginning in 1990, I started to explore the possibility of using experience-based learning opportunities to supplement classroom instruction. At an individual professional level, this has evolved over the years into a pedagogical approach that seeks to educate by triangulating learning. At an institutional level, fifteen years has seen the evolution of service-learning grow from its use in fewer than a handful of courses to a campuswide initiative with significant support from the senior administration. While the specific frame of reference is a course on state and local government, the triangulated learning methodology has relevance beyond this course or even social science courses in general.

The course in its current design addresses a single goal: to make learning about subnational government relevant enough to students that they will take an active interest in the subject matter and think about their impact on their lives beyond the limited confines of the semester and its conclusion, the final grade. It is about the challenge of seeking methods to increase the intrinsic value of their learning against the more extrinsic value



of credentialing. This goal has led to the evolution of State and Local Government at Wartburg College in Iowa from a traditional classroom course relying on textbooks, research papers, the occasional guest speaker, and exams to what I define as *triangulated learning*, a term that describes the integration of three sources of information: traditional text-based learning, current events discussions, and experience-based learning. This chapter addresses some of the challenges and rewards I have encountered employing triangulated learning as a type of service-learning, and I hope it will allow readers to avoid some of the mistakes made and take advantage of the lessons learned.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first makes the case for service-learning as a pedagogy worthy of greater attention by the higher education community of scholars. It also addresses a concern that has been expressed repeatedly over the years, especially by junior faculty members, who sometimes face resistance by colleagues who may convey skepticism about the value of integrating service-learning into the curriculum. The second section focuses on the concept of triangulated learning and its application to courses in State and Local Government. The third section is a user's guide for the development and implementation of a service-learning course based on the concept of triangulated learning. It focuses on the nuts-and-bolts matters that can make the difference in developing and implementing a course that maximizes the potential of service-learning to meet particular curricular goals. The fourth section reports on how service-learning has evolved over the years at Wartburg from a few courses taught by a handful of faculty members into a collegewide focus that includes the commitment of financial and human resources to facilitate various kinds of experiential learning including service-learning. In its most recent iteration, this institutional commitment has led to the creation of the Center for Community Engagement.

## THE MEANING AND VALUE OF SERVICE-LEARNING

In this section, I define service-learning, review how it is different from traditional internships and field experiences, and discuss its value over other classroom methods.

## MEANING

Service-learning is a type of experiential learning that seeks to integrate and connect student needs and community needs to the mutual benefit of each. The number of definitions for service-learning is large, but most align themselves more or less with how it is defined in federal law by the National and Community Service Act of 1990 (as amended through December 17, 1999, P.L. 106–170):

*(23) Service-Learning*

The term “service-learning” means a method—

- (A) under which students or participants learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that—
  - (i) is conducted in and meets the needs of a community;
  - (ii) is coordinated with an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, or community service program, and with the community; and
  - (iii) helps foster civic responsibility; and
- (B) that—
  - (i) is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students, or the educational components of the community service program in which the participants are enrolled; and
  - (ii) provides structured time for the students or participants to reflect on the service experience [p. 10].

Various types of experiential learning opportunities exist at Wartburg College in addition to courses that aspire to the service-learning model. Two common opportunities are internships and field experiences. The distinctions among the three types may be ones of degree or of kind. Here the emphasis is on factors that may distinguish among them as one means to emphasize the characteristics of a service-learning experience. Internships tend to be focused on preparatory training for a career that is discipline related. This may range from a finance major interning at a bank to a biochemistry major interning at a research laboratory. In both instances, the purpose of the internship is to give the students an applied learning opportunity directly connected to their academic field that will enhance their opportunities for employment or graduate school within that field. Internships normally take

place in the latter half of students' academic career after they have attained some level of professional proficiency or expertise.

Field placements are also generally oriented toward career goals. Students are placed in venues they are considering as potential career paths. The expectations for field placement students is they will observe, or job-shadow, in an applied setting. This may occur in a school classroom for students considering teaching as a career or in a judge's courtroom for a student considering a legal career. The students are not normally expected to bring the kind of expertise to the site placement that would allow them to add substantial value to the activity of the site. Field experiences may occur any time, but they tend to occur earlier in a student's academic career than an internship.

#### THE VALUE OF SERVICE-LEARNING

Recent developments in higher education place increasing value on active learning, whereby students are required to take initiative and responsibility for their learning beyond sitting in class, taking notes, and being tested for content (the American Association of Colleges and Universities and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* are two widely respected sources where this topic has been discussed at length). Growing interest in undergraduate research is but one example of this trend. Bringing out-of-the-classroom experiences into the academic endeavor is a pedagogical orientation with a long and rich tradition. This overview relies on the work of two prominent scholars as touchstones to help provide the context for using experiential education in general and service-learning in particular in courses pertaining to the study of state and local government.

The philosopher and psychologist John Dewey, a scholar at the forefront of educational reform in the early twentieth century, observed that intentional reflection on the value of experience in education traced its roots back at least to the writings of Montaigne, Bacon, and Locke. He believed that as civilized societies advanced, they needed a formalized structure of education for the young, but that this posed some inherent risks as the concepts and symbols of generalized education became increasingly abstract and less connected to life's experience. "As societies become more complex in structure and resources," he

wrote, “the need of formal or intentional teaching and learning increases. As formal teaching and training grow in extent, there is the danger of creating an undesirable split between the experience gained in more direct associations and what is acquired in school” (Dewey, 1923, p. 11). Dewey believed that for formal education to retain its relevance, it had to connect experientially the learner to the greater society for which the learner was being prepared. Consequently, it is in the interest of professionals involved in formal education, the students who participate in it, and the greater society that supports it to be intentional about connecting experience with formal education.

Jean Piaget, a well-established and respected biologist, decided midcareer to refocus his attention on learning and education. He came to believe in the value of experience based on his interest and research in cognitive development. According to Piaget (1972), to maximize the value of learning and make it more meaningful requires the student to go beyond merely listening and to engage in self-discovery: “To understand is to discover, or reconstruct by rediscovery, and such conditions must be complied with if in the future individuals are to be formed who are capable of production and creativity and not simply repetition” (p. 20). The teacher is most useful as a guide who has confidence in the student’s ability to learn on his or her own. This is not to denigrate the potential value of the lecture format, for example. It may very well be a necessary condition for some types of learning, but it may not be a sufficient condition to maximize learning.

The natural sciences have long understood the value of testing hypotheses through experimentation and reflecting on the implications of the experiment—a form of experiential learning. Both words share the same Latin root, *experiri*, meaning “to test, try.” The natural and social sciences place a high premium on empiricism, which has its roots in the philosophical work of John Locke and David Hume, who held that the source of human knowledge is derived from the senses. If empiricism is at the core of the scientific method and if the social sciences aspire to be “scientific,” as the name suggests, using experiential education seems both natural and congruent with this orientation.

Service-learning is a subset of experiential learning. It incorporates experience as a venue for learning and serving in a

manner that is mutually beneficial to all parties involved in terms of meeting their respective goals and needs. The degree of reciprocity attained is one measure of its success. Service-learning is a goal to which State and Local Government at Wartburg aspires. Sometimes those aspirations are met, and sometimes they are not. The challenge is to create a learning environment that maximizes the potential for service-learning to be practiced.

### DESCRIBING AND EMPLOYING TRIANGULATED LEARNING IN *STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT*

Triangulated learning seeks to integrate knowledge and information primarily from three sources: text and other academic materials, current events from reputable news sources, and site placement learning experience to help the student understand better the intricacies of state and local government. How students make the connection is highly variable depending on their level of competence with respect to all three learning venues, but it must be made in a coherent manner that demonstrates their capacity to engage in critical inquiry by taking knowledge and information from one domain and transferring and applying it to another domain and conversing about it intelligently.

The first two parameters may be discussed fairly quickly, as they are widely applied in college and university classrooms throughout the country, and their value in the academy is largely assumed. It is not the purpose of this chapter to challenge or undermine that assumption, but rather to identify potential limitations and how those limitations might be mitigated using the other two approaches. Most textbooks on state and local government tend to be descriptive and not very theoretical. But with few exceptions, the description tends to be a general overview of institutional frameworks and processes that have relatively little to do with the particulars of a given locality. Both current events discussions and experiential learning projects, when appropriately overlaid with the text, can enrich its value by providing specific, concrete examples that can bring the material in the text to life.

Current events offer the opportunity to bring relevant news of the day to classroom discussion, but the media sources from which

they are derived normally do not put them in a context most useful for an academic discussion. To account for this limitation, a worksheet template has been developed for students to complete prior to class. Items that the students are asked to address in the worksheet include: How does the current event relate to the topic? How does the news source inform your understanding of the topic as presented in the assigned reading? How does the assigned reading help you understand better the story covered in the news source you have identified? In what ways might this topic pertain to your site placement and experiential learning? It is relatively rare that multiple students identify the same news source and the same theme in the text. Consequently there is the potential for a discussion that is based on the individual “expertise” that each student brings independently to the discussion based on events he or she has self-identified as relevant to the general topic or theme.

The third side of the triangle, site placement, experience-based learning, creates a situation where each student is placed in an environment that gives him or her the opportunity to learn in-depth about a particular aspect of state or local government. Like the current events worksheet format, the site placement offers each student the opportunity to bring his or her own learning experiences to the conversation. The site placement experience provides each student with a particular perspective on state and local government that reflects the culture of the site where the student is placed. The students develop over the course of the term a sense of that culture, which they are able to bring to bear in the discussions pertaining to the other two sides of the learning triangle.

The experiential component of the triangle is a greater challenge to manage compared to the selection of a textbook and the design of a worksheet. The first management challenge involves communications. However the experiential learning experience is organized, the complexity of communication is increased at least threefold. With two individuals involved (the instructor and the student), there are only two lines of communication that need to function efficiently: communication from the instructor to the student and from the student to the instructor. Experienced teachers know that this relatively straightforward and simple communications network can be difficult enough to manage. When a community partner is brought into the communications network,

this adds four more lines of communication that have to be managed: the two-way communication between the instructor and the community partner and the two-way communication between the student and the community partner. These last two lines can be especially problematic in terms of ensuring that the relationship meets the course goals.

The second management challenge (which is interdependent with the communications challenge) is logistical. Identifying and securing sites for placing students that provide an appropriate learning environment and an opportunity to add value to the organization with their presence is not a simple task. An appropriate learning environment is necessary if the experience is to be truly educational. Adding value to the organization is necessary if the participation of the community partner is to be sustainable over time measured in years. When both of these are present, the probability for service-learning to occur increases significantly.

If this learning triangle is constructed and implemented appropriately, then all sides of the triangle may complement one another and create a service-learning environment that brings at least three different dimensions to the educational enterprise. The text serves as a common point of reference for all. It provides a common language and context that is a necessary condition for fruitful intellectual dialogue. The worksheet allows each student the opportunity to identify a current event he or she finds interesting and how it relates to the common topic presented in the text. The experiential learning site placement allows the further development of expertise from the vantage point of a specific governmental organization. This is the essential design for the course. The challenge is to make the course operational in a manner that maximizes the learning outcomes intended in the rationale and design.

## THE SERVICE-LEARNING MODEL IN *STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT* AT WARTBURG COLLEGE

Wartburg College is located in Waverly, part of the Iowa Cedar Valley. A community of approximately ten thousand, Waverly has a robust municipal government and is the county seat of

Bremer County. Abutting Bremer County is Black Hawk County. Its county seat, Waterloo, with a population of more than sixty-eight thousand, is only fifteen miles from Waverly. Consequently, numerous local government organizations at both the municipal and county levels offer the potential for student placements.

Wartburg College is a small, private college in the liberal arts tradition with approximately eighteen hundred students. The students who enroll in State and Local Government span a range of academic majors and interests. As a 200-level course, it tends to attract first- and second-year students who are considering political science as a major or minor area of study. But students from business and finance, community sociology, and communication arts also routinely populate the course. It is not a group of students who aspire to careers in state and local government, although some come to that conclusion by the end of the term. In short, the student profile for the course is not one that would lend itself to a preprofessional field placement or internship format.

Matriculated students register for courses only once a year (in March) for the following academic year. (Students may add and drop classes after that, and new students register during the summer, but the general constellation of students for State and Local Government has remained relatively stable over the years after March registration.) In addition, I can go online and see an abbreviated profile of the students enrolled. This gives me the advantage of knowing well in advance what the likely composition of the class is going to be.

#### ADVANCE PREPARATION

The first decision to make is a determination of what organizations and agencies to include as potential site placements. During the first few years, I made an effort to restrict site placements to official government agencies. Although the large majority of site placements remain government agencies, other organizations have been included as site placements as well. There are two primary reasons for this, and both have to do with developing a more comprehensive picture of how different types of organizations serve the public, whether they are official government

agencies or nongovernmental organizations that may or may not receive funding to fulfill public needs. One reason is that privatization of government services has affected local government. For example, Bremer County used to own and operate what was euphemistically called the “county poor farm” to serve an indigent population with little in the way of a social safety net. These same services are now provided by a variety of nongovernmental organizations that are partially funded by the county and state to pay for services that the county once provided. The second reason is that some organizations provide services that are perceived as highly desirable by local government, but due to certain regulations and other legal aspects, it is more convenient to have these services provided by a nongovernmental organization. The Waverly Area Development Group is an example of this type of organization. Part of its responsibility is to provide economic development assistance, and in this role, it works closely with city officials, both elected and professional staff.

The communication network begins to be constructed at least five or six weeks before the term in which the course is being taught. This communication is between the potential site supervisor and me as the instructor and between the student and me. The first effort is to contact individuals in state or local government positions who have served as site supervisors in the past. Experience has taught me never to assume that because an individual has agreed to serve as a site supervisor previously, he or she is in a position or cares to do so again. This information provides the base for determining how many, if any, new site placements may be needed. If new placements are needed, I recruit replacements with letters, personal visits, and telephone calls. This process is less demanding than it may appear on its face because of relationships I have built throughout eighteen years of teaching and civic engagement in the Cedar Valley.

Critical to a successful service-learning site placement is a clear understanding at the outset about what I expect from student placements. The best opportunities from the student’s perspective are those that allow him or her to work with senior management and offer the opportunity for the student to develop an appreciation of how the work undertaken integrates into a broader perspective on the operations of state and local

government. These may vary from a special project or activity of a more routine nature. The issue of reciprocity is also emphasized at the outset. The site placement candidates are encouraged to identify potential projects for students they think would be of value to their organizations, as well as provide students with a good learning opportunity.

Experience has taught me that student awareness of the course parameters prior to going into class is haphazard at best, catalogue copy notwithstanding. Consequently I send an e-mail to each student approximately three weeks before the course commences, reminding them about the structure of the course and the expectation that they will spend at least two hours a week throughout the bulk of the term with a state or local government organization where they will undertake some kind of project designed by the site placement supervisor. This also gives me the opportunity to offer the students a list of potential site placements and poll them to determine if there are particular types of state or local government organizations that they would like to experience. This invariably leads to the identification of individuals interested in law enforcement or parks and recreation management, to name two examples. Students are also encouraged to arrange their own site placements if they have contacts. However, students are forewarned that they are not guaranteed their first preference. A number of factors go into placements. This includes a breadth of placements that touch on different aspects of state and local government. Once students are assigned to a site, both the student and the supervisor are given a copy of the expectations students are to meet during the term, including a copy of the evaluation form the site supervisor will be asked to complete at the end of the term. In addition, the site supervisor is given a copy of the student self-assessment form each student will complete at the end of the term.

The purpose of this preterm communication is to establish a precedent for open channels of communication to encourage ongoing dialogue throughout the course of the term. There are two potentially negative consequences as a result of the preterm process. Some students, for a variety of reasons, drop the course prior to its start. It has also happened, although much less frequently, that a site supervisor has felt it necessary to back out

of a commitment. In both instances, there is the risk of disappointment by the other party. This also discounts the value of the time and effort I put into the preterm work. But on balance, the potential risk is well worth the overall benefits that accrue to the quality of the course as a whole.

### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PEDAGOGY DURING THE TERM

The implementation of the pedagogy during the term in which the course is taught falls into three general stages that can be defined as orientation, implementation, and assessment and evaluation. These stages are linear but not discrete, as they bleed into each other in terms of both the process as a whole and the different rates at which students develop an understanding of the overall pedagogy. For example, one student may still be in the orientation stage, while another is in the implementation stage. Perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of the three stages from a pedagogical perspective is the transference of teaching responsibility from instructor to students.

#### *First Stage: Orientation*

The first few class sessions tend to be rather chaotic and bifurcated as the students employ the three components (text, current events, and site placement) in a discrete rather than integrative fashion. Student anxiety can be rather high for those who have little experience with a multidimensional learning format. To counter this anxiety, I have found it useful to adopt a coaching approach in which I encourage the student to view me as an ally in the journey through the course. But like a good coach, I must encourage the reluctant students to accept responsibility for their own success in this kind of learning environment. It is up to the student to connect the dots that ultimately form the learning triangle. For the better students, this may take less than a week. For others, it may take up to three weeks. The length of time it takes is partially dependent on the degree to which students embrace the site placement opportunity and the degree of initiative they possess—two highly variable factors. Another factor is the availability of the site supervisor.

One of the most important aspects of the course is the initial meeting between the student and the site placement supervisor. It is the student's responsibility to make the initial contact and arrange a meeting. Students are asked to review the expectations of the site placement supervisor in terms of the project that will be undertaken, and they review with the site supervisors the evaluation form the supervisor will be asked to complete at the end of the term. The form also gives the student a concrete set of guidelines with respect to expectations regarding dress, attitude, and performance.

### *Second Stage: Implementation*

The implementation stage takes up the bulk of the term. It is during this stage that the student develops a working relationship with the site supervisor and staff, engages in a project, and attends meetings, including a city council meeting and a board or commission meeting relevant to the site placement when that is appropriate. One challenge for me during this phase is to ensure that the student, while at the site placement, is engaged in learning that pertains to the goals of the course. Two mechanisms are used toward this end. One is the completion of weekly worksheets. The worksheet template explicitly asks the student if he or she is able to make some connection between the text, a current event, and the site placement. But the worksheet has its limitations in this regard. Its primary use is to generate a class discussion that allows students to develop a certain expertise and bring that to bear on whatever the topic for the day may be. Sometimes the topic and the site placement are too disparate to make a credible connection.

To compensate for the limitation of the worksheet, students are also required to submit journal entries. The entries are sent electronically at least once a week for the duration of the site placement. A review of these entries can give me a good sense of what the student is accomplishing and whether some type of intervention may be needed to ensure a maximum learning experience for the student.

Aside from the site placement work, this is also the stage where the textbook is used and I employ more traditional teaching techniques in the classroom: lecture, discussion, exams, and

other familiar pedagogical devices. Little can be added regarding these devices that is not familiar to most instructors of State and Local Government or college instructors in general. Perhaps it is worth noting that student-generated worksheet discussions are used to construct items on exams. This is intended to demonstrate the degree to which I take seriously this aspect of the classroom experience, and it encourages students to do the same.

Another important aspect of the orientation process is to educate the students about how to learn while at their site placement. Toward this end, I provide a brief introduction to ethnography and ethnographic research. There are three reasons for exposing the students to an ethnographic approach. First, it gives them some tools about how to learn in a field setting: what to look for, how to follow up on observations, and how to analyze or interpret observations. Analysis and interpretation focus mostly on cautioning students to understand the limits of their expertise and not to jump to faulty conclusions as a result. The second reason is that it gives the students some context for how to use their environment to its best learning advantage. For example, working near the water-cooler in an open area with active human traffic may be much more productive than being isolated in a small office in terms of learning about the cultural norms of the site. Third, students who have options about the types of work they may be asked to perform can exercise the options that maximize the value of the site placement from an ethnographic perspective.

One of the site placement learning devices that the students are required to employ is keeping a journal. Part of the orientation stage is teaching the students how to use good journaling techniques as tools for reflection that can aid them in their ethnographic research and help them integrate the elements of the course. For this to be successful requires intentional work on my part to prevent receiving journals that simply record dates, times, and activities and not very different from a time sheet. Students are given literature about various benefits of journaling and what kind of journaling is appropriate to ensure intentional reflection pertinent to the purpose of the site placement within the context of the course.

The journaling process is one way to evaluate the student's capacity to understand successfully and use the triangulated

learning process. Below are two journal entry excerpts (unedited) by the same student; the first follows the first site visit, the second follows the last.

In class, I learned much of the basic structure and responsibilities of a state government. I learned what decisions they have to make, how they make those, and how much of a direct impact they have on me. I learned that there are many ways these local branches coexist with the federal government, and how both work together to provide the best possible service to their constituents. Without the local governments as the backbone of our government, many of the great services that we take advantage of would be lost and our cities would be a much bigger mess. The reading simply managed to open my eyes as to all that these governments did.

My field experience with the Waverly City Council and their city administrator . . . simply astonished me. My duties eventually will consist of preparing the agenda for city council meetings as well as putting together and reviewing budget reports. As a part of my first day in the office, I looked over the agenda for last week's meeting. I was astonished as to the range of topics covered.



I helped to assemble the agenda for the study session next council meeting. The new budget has just been recently released, which has also put a buzz in the council. Of course, the copier that I helped research the first weeks was broken again, and the office was back to attempting to decide whether to buy a new one. Mostly though, I learned that there is a tremendous amount of responsibility invested in the city council. They have a huge budget, employ many people, and affect every single person in the city with whatever decision they made. I was amazed at how important all of the decisions they make are, and the experience has truly allowed me to appreciate how vital a good city council is to our city growing.

At the same time, I learned how to apply this to my home town, where I learned that Cedar Rapids is going through a budget crisis. They face the option of raising taxes drastically or making tough spending cuts. They have chosen the latter, and now must slash spending in all areas, angering a lot of people. This connected greatly with the fiscal chapters that we studied in class on

Wednesday, allowing me to understand how hard it is to simply take money from a program. Everyone feels that the money cut should be from the other program, not their own, which makes their job that much more difficult.

The level of analysis is more sophisticated in the second entry at several levels. The student makes connections between the site placement and the readings from the text and extrapolates from this learning to make inferences about policy decisions in his home town based on keeping up with current events there. There is strong evidence of triangulated learning in a service-learning environment.

### *Third Stage: Assessment and Evaluation*

Just as it is important to prepare students for their site placements so they can begin their site placement experiences well, it is equally important for the students to conclude their site placements well. At least two weeks before the conclusion of the site placement work, students meet with the site placement supervisor to review the status of the project in light of the remaining time and to set priorities about what the site supervisor would like accomplished in that time. This process helps maintain mutual understanding among all participants with respect to expectations. Before I made this an intentional part of the program several years ago, one student simply stopped showing up. The student's site supervisor, who had developed a positive working relationship with the student, called me to ask if the student had an accident or had otherwise come into some kind of unfortunate situation. The student, for his part, thought the site supervisor was aware that his placement had come to an end because he had successfully completed the project during the time allotted. While this particular situation was ultimately resolved to the satisfaction of all parties, it became clear to me that a more intentional focus on how the site visit should be concluded was just as important as how it was initiated, and this has been an integral part of the course since.

The site placement process culminates with the site supervisor completing an evaluation of the student and his or her work. In this evaluation, the supervisor begins by estimating the number

of hours the student was on site and describes the nature of the project the student undertook and its value to the organization. The supervisor then rates the student's performance on a ten-point Likert scale regarding seven items that pertain to professionalism, dress, attitude, performance, initiative, responsibility, and whether the supervisor would like to work with the student again. The evaluation ends with an open-ended item asking the site supervisor to make any additional comments he or she thinks are relevant to the student's performance and the experience in general. The survey is sent through the postal system with a stamped, return envelope. Completion rates by the site supervisor have been close to 100 percent over the years. The following is typical of the kinds of open-ended responses site supervisors provide: "[Student X] displayed a professional and friendly attitude during the entire experience. He represented both Wartburg and himself in an extremely positive manner. I enjoyed getting to know [student X] and wish him success in whatever profession he chooses." Site supervisors tend to offer more reassurance than concrete information helpful in the evaluation process. Nevertheless, such reassurance has its own value.

Students complete a self-evaluation at the conclusion of their site placement that replicates in part the evaluation form completed by the site supervisors (for example, on the nature of the project undertaken and the amount of time spent on the project). If there are discrepancies in the descriptive data provided by the site supervisor and the student, further discussions ensue, although this happens very rarely, and in only a few instances over the years has reconciliation of the differences proved to be problematic. Because everyone knows what the expectations are and what evaluations will look like going into the project, there is relatively little opportunity for misunderstanding in this regard.

Much of the student self-assessment is open-ended and seeks to determine the quality of placement and supervision. Self-assessment items include (1) aspects of the project with which the student was most satisfied and least satisfied; (2) reflections about what the student would do differently given what he or she knows at the end of the term if given the opportunity to start over; (3) reflections on what the site placement experience contributed to the student's understanding about state and local government;

(4) assessments of what the student learned about state and local government by undertaking the project; (5) what the student thought he or she learned that would not have been learned without the site placement experience; and (6) anything else the student wants to add about the experience. Below is a representative example of one student's self-assessment as it pertains to questions 5 and 6.

5. What do you think you learned about state and local government that you would not have learned had you not undertaken an active learning project?

Obviously basically all the things in the prior question that I talked about are the things I would not have learned had I not had the active learning project. This is due to the fact that I would not have been directly working with all these issues. In addition to all the different aspects of state and local government already listed, I would not have had the opportunity to work with the people I met and to continue to improve my people skills and in this situation in the area of local government. Without the active learning I would have been limited to what I read in the books. While it was good information I find that my project did a great job of reinforcing many of the things we learned in class and our books. As a result I was able to get a much stronger grip on many of the topics we covered this semester in class.

6. Is there anything else you would like to add? (optional)

The things I covered on this evaluation are not everything I have learned while at my internship. For a much more in-depth look at all the aspects see my journals and semester end project.

It is worth noting that the amount of student learning that takes place is sometimes not recognized by the site supervisor, and there have been times when the site supervisor has been almost apologetic that the student did not get more out of the experience. For example, the site supervisor of the student quoted directly above wrote the following:

[Student Y] is an extremely likable, intelligent young man. He was willing to do any job requested with very minimal supervision. The work we do is fairly routine but [student Y] never acted

bored. He also helped organize our health insurance packets for employees.

The discussion the Election Deputy and I had with him about “same day [voter] registration” eased our concerns. [The nature of these concerns was never stated.]

Thank you for the opportunity of working with [student Y].

Students are also asked to rank their educational experience on a fifty-point scale. The self-evaluation is graded according to the quality of the responses measured in the student’s capacity to demonstrate the skills of critical inquiry in terms of making connections between the placement experiences and the course content and taking a level of responsibility and ownership in the learning experience. This exercise is treated much like a take-home final.

The final three weeks of the term are devoted to the preparation and presentation of student-led seminars in the field of expertise they have cultivated over the course of the term. Part of the preparation includes identifying a suitable reading assigned to the class, which is intended to provide all participants some background information that permits an interactive discussion. In recent years, the typical session begins with a PowerPoint presentation that describes the site placement experience and the project undertaken, how it relates to the material discussed in class over the course of the term, and a set of discussion questions. Students are expected to have enough material to engage the other students for at least thirty minutes, but normally sessions last forty-five minutes or longer. This experience reveals as few other methods of assessment can what the students learned and how engaged they were in the site placement. The interactive and spontaneous nature of the seminar format allows student presenters to demonstrate how much they know (or do not know). Each presentation is peer-reviewed using a ten-point Likert scale to assess preparation, clarity, coherence, discussion questions, and overall effectiveness. Students are also asked to identify the strongest and weakest parts of the presentation. These data are aggregated and shared with the presenter. The content of these student-led seminars serves as the basis for the final examination of the term.

*Moving to Active Learners*

The three stages of the course are designed to move the student ever increasingly to the role of active learner with shared teaching responsibilities. The assessment and evaluation tools are designed to aid in this process. Initially I placed less weight on the experiential learning and peer evaluation portions of the course for two reasons. First, there was uncertainty about what tools should be used to evaluate the site placement and how they would be used by site placement supervisors and students. Second, there was a sense that self-assessment and peer evaluation might result in grade inflation that could distort the final results beyond the norms acceptable to me. Confidence in the tools and their use has increased over the years as both site supervisors and students have used them responsibly and effectively (it is not uncommon that site supervisors rate students higher than the students rate themselves in their self-assessment). Similarly, self-assessment and peer evaluation have produced results well within parameters the instructor finds appropriate.

## MOVING TO AN INSTITUTIONAL EMPHASIS ON SERVICE-LEARNING

From my perspective, the triangulated learning model has created a positive environment for service-learning to occur within the framework of the State and Local Government course at Wartburg College. But beyond this, there has been a larger institutional commitment to this pedagogy by the college as a whole. Testimony to this is the Voices piece at the end of the chapter by the president of Wartburg, which takes an institutional perspective on the evolution of service-learning on campus. Here the perspective is that of a faculty member.

In 2004, Wartburg College recognized the expanded interest of faculty in developing experiential learning courses including service-learning courses. While the college and certain members of the faculty have long advocated the expansion of this pedagogy throughout the curriculum, its growing use has brought additional challenges. First, many faculty members who experimented with service-learning saw and appreciated its advantages, but simply did not think they could afford the additional time and effort

that setting up a quality service-learning course required. Also, instructors who had been employing service-learning witnessed increasing “competition” for site placements, a potential source of disruption. In addition, there was increasing confusion in the community as different instructors from the college approached potential partners with different agendas according to their disciplinary or course-level needs.

To address this concern, the college administration took a proactive approach with support from the Eli Lilly Foundation to create the Center for Community Engagement (CCE). Currently the CCE has a full-time staff of four individuals: a community partners coordinator, a school partners coordinator, an internship coordinator, and a service trips coordinator. Most relevant for purposes of this chapter is the position of the community partners coordinator, although this model applies more or less to all staff members of the CCE. Once it was the responsibility of the individual instructor to set up site placements; that responsibility has started to shift to the community partners coordinator. In its first year, the transition has worked quite well and has indeed shifted some of the logistical burden of setting up site placements away from the instructor. It is anticipated that as the community partners coordinator gains greater familiarity with the community (this is only his second year at Wartburg) this opportunity for one-stop shopping for faculty will add considerable value to experiential learning courses by reducing the workload side of the equation for faculty members with respect to logistics.

There are also potential costs associated with the creation of an office like the CCE beyond the obvious resource issues. First, the challenge to the instructor of remaining informed about the learning that is taking place on site and the relationship between the site supervisor and the student may be even more problematic with the reduced level of contact between instructor and site supervisor. Second, the CCE is staffed by academic staff personnel, and these kinds of positions often experience relatively high turnover. Key to the development of a strong pool of potential site placements is the development of relationships between a representative of the college and the site supervisors. Staff turnover presents challenges to maintaining the kinds of relationships that are necessary for maintaining a strong, sustainable pool of potential

site placements. On balance, the creation of the CCE has been met with approval by the faculty, but it is not a panacea. It requires an intentional approach on the part of the college or university to ensure that its structure and staffing are appropriate for both the institution and the larger community in which it resides.

## CONCLUSION

At the start of the chapter, I indicated that service-learning is a pedagogy to which the instructor aspires. While the instructor can guarantee an experiential learning opportunity, he or she cannot guarantee a service-learning experience. This is the case because even if the course is implemented as an integrated learning experience, it involves collaboration among three individuals: the instructor, the student, and the site supervisor. As is true with any other collaboration, the capacity to turn aspiration into reality is dependent on the effort and understanding that all collaborating partners are willing to put into it. Consequently, it is possible in any given class to have some students for whom the course meets the service-learning threshold and some for whom it does not by virtue of a number of variables, including student initiative, interest, and intellectual capacity. Simultaneously, the degree of understanding and skill that the site supervisors bring to the table is equally important. They have to understand the sense of reciprocity that service-learning entails and provide the opportunity for students to engage in meaningful activities that add value to the organization if service-learning is to occur. My experience is that the more often state and local government professionals participate as site placement supervisors, the better they understand the purpose of service-learning and the better able they are to provide a site placement experience that meets its pedagogical objectives. Finally, the instructor must be open and flexible to the unexpected and be willing to serve as a broker and mediator to ensure that everyone is benefiting from the experience.

There are no guarantees that the triangulated educational experience will be successful for every student. It requires the genuine commitment of all three partners: the instructor, the student, and the site placement supervisor. It means more work for the instructor than simply preparing lectures and otherwise

engaging the more traditional learning models. But it can also be much more interesting and rewarding for all parties. For the students, it provides a learning experience that encourages them to take greater ownership of their education and challenges them to think about different contexts for learning and what that might imply about applying the skills of critical inquiry throughout their lives. For site supervisors, it provides the opportunity to play a mentoring role to college students, an opportunity that may be underappreciated by instructors in the academy who work with talented college students on a daily basis. There have been several instances where site supervisors and students have remained in contact years after the student has completed the course. For the instructor, it creates a dynamic and exciting learning environment with new challenges and opportunities. It also creates closer relations between higher education and other significant institutions in the community that can help foster a more positive community atmosphere of collaboration.

Skeptics frequently ask what evidence the practitioner has that service-learning is effective. By this, they normally seek to ascertain whether quantitative empirical evidence exists supporting the view that the pedagogy improves learning. Others and I have addressed this topic at length elsewhere and need not repeat it here. Suffice it to say for purposes of this chapter that I am confident that triangulated learning has produced a more sophisticated understanding of the course content through an integrated learning process consistent with the higher-order learning outcomes suggested by the work of Dewey and Piaget. Student performance on exams, the quality of writing, feedback in course evaluations, and other means confirm my professional judgment that this pedagogy provides a learning experience that transcends the traditional classroom model.

Parenthetically, it is worth noting a heuristic device that is widely cited (more than 700,000 results from a Google search, including scholarly references) as providing evidence that active learning techniques consistent with the theoretical perspectives of Dewey, Piaget, and many others lead to increased retention of what has been taught. This device, the learning pyramid of retention, is attributed to research associated with the National Training Laboratories in Bethel, Maine. According to this source, the

rates of student retention of knowledge increase dramatically as the degree of interactivity on the part of the learner increases. For example, the rate of retention for “lecture” (identified as the least active form of learning) is reported to be 5 percent, while the rate of retention for “teaching others” (identified as the most active form of learning) is reported to be 90 percent. Intuitively appealing as the learning pyramid may be, the research data supporting these percentages seem nowhere to be found. I bring this to readers’ attention because it is equally, if not more, important that faculty members and scholars who employ active learning techniques including service-learning retain the same level of rigor in assessing the evidence mounted for its value that they employ for other types of research. To do otherwise is both a disservice to respect for the pedagogy and to the methodological standards of the social sciences.

## Voices: Partners in Service-Learning

### THE WAVERLY LIGHT AND POWER AND WARTBURG COLLEGE PARTNERSHIP

*Glenn Cannon*

Waverly Light and Power values the relationship with Wartburg College and the students who partner with us daily. When we were first approached by Wartburg on the idea of having students involved in our operation, I looked at it as time we would spend teaching them about what we do. Instead, we learn a great deal from the students, and they are an immense help in giving us fresh ideas and perspectives. In a large sense, the students keep us young. The students come to work in our building to be exposed to many different occupations and experiences. They are able to work around their college classes and outside activities. Waverly Light and Power gains a valuable person with fresh training and new ideas to help our experienced staff perform many tasks. In fact, much of the work we produce could not be accomplished without the help of the students. In our financial area, a host of students over the years have helped design, implement, and update numerous reports for us. A few of these include our performance indicators (comparing our operations to that of others in our industry), outage records (tracking our annual electrical disturbances and the causes), and financial models (which help us forecast our future financial performance and are the basis for when we need to issue bonds and change rates and our energy efficiency records)—comparing our customer take rate on various program offerings and the effectiveness of

each. We have also had students who worked on special projects like a summary history of our pioneering the development of soy-bean-based transformer oil. One of our Wartburg students went on to work for the accounting firm of Virchow Krause and Company and initially worked on utility auditing. A side benefit that we had never considered was the diversity that we gain from having new students work with us. We have had students from Nepal, Rwanda, Colombia, and the Republic of Georgia. We also had a young woman from Ukraine who ended up with a C.P.A. and is working for a major insurance company in Des Moines. Two of our Wartburg students married each other.

We will continue to seek the partnership of the college and its students. The students routinely visit us after they have graduated and share how their experiences helped them gain an understanding of the real world and how to prepare for it. It is in all respects a win-win situation.



Glenn Cannon is general manager of Waverly Light and Power.

## SERVICE-LEARNING AS AN INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITY AT WARTBURG COLLEGE

*Jack R. Ohle*

The power and authority of college and university presidents and chancellors is often exaggerated and misunderstood. But given the privilege of our perspective, we do have the opportunity to see the big picture of the workings of the institutions we serve. Following is one example of how this unique perspective permitted the identification of a need and the means used to mobilize the Wartburg campus community to help address that need.

When I became president of Wartburg College, one of the first tasks I set for myself was to see what elements of the college aligned most closely with its mission: "Wartburg College is dedicated to challenging and nurturing students for lives of leadership

and service as a spirited expression of their faith and learning.” My inventory led me to identify a few curricular offerings that embodied what I understood as elements of service-learning. Beyond the curriculum, I discovered in the Office of Student Life a cocurricular Volunteer Action Center (VAC), which served as a clearinghouse for matching community needs with student interests. Student Life also had responsibility for facilitating the organization of service trips, which occurred during our fall and winter term breaks. Both initiatives had been created as a result of the work of the director of Wartburg’s Institute for Leadership Education (ILE) by securing outside funding to help satisfy the needs of students involved in leadership education. But the primary responsibilities of the ILE are academic, and its focus is helping students meet the requirements for the Leadership Certificate Program, an academic minor in the college curriculum.

These were aspects of the college that spoke to its mission of “leadership and service” in a direct and compelling manner, but it seemed from my vantage point as president and as a result of conversation with various faculty and staff that these experiential activities were rather fragmented. Each had its own constituency of loyal advocates, but they focused on their individual needs, which at times led them to compete with one another, sometimes inadvertently, for resources and other forms of support. As a result, Wartburg was not maximizing the value these enterprises could add to the vibrancy of the college community as they might if there were a greater sense of collaboration and cohesion among them.

The opportunity to address this challenge came when Wartburg College was invited to apply for a grant from the Lilly Endowment. To take full advantage of this opportunity required giving voice to the entire campus community in setting the agenda for how the grant might enhance Wartburg’s mission. The final result was a campuswide initiative called “Discovering and Claiming Our Callings.” One of the many contributions of this program has been to bring greater recognition of the value of collaboration and coordination among curricular (such as service-learning courses) and cocurricular (such as service trips) activities pertaining to leadership and service. This has helped to elevate to a higher level of consciousness the centrality of these activities to the mission of the college.

Meeting this threshold required both symbolic and substantive change. The campus community needed a concrete image that spoke of the college's commitment to the mission, especially as it pertains to leadership and service. But it also had to produce results that confirmed the commitment of resources to such an enterprise. To accomplish this effectively, the decision was made, after a year-long study of how best to integrate existing programs, to create a new entity on the campus, the Center for Community Engagement (CCE), and associate it closely with the ILE. The rationale for this decision was that many of the support services under the direction of the CCE were created to benefit students working toward their leadership certificate. The creation of the CCE and its close association with the ILE was the end product of the effort to merge symbolic and substantive change.

The symbolism has been apparent to the campus community and beyond. The CCE and the ILE are colocated in a prominent public space on campus and staffed with significant resources. In addition, with its own director, the CCE brings under one administrative structure the Volunteer Action Center, academic internships, service trips, and support for service-learning courses. Changes in administrative structure alone do not necessarily mean greater effectiveness, but preliminary response to the creation of the CCE has been positive by faculty members, students, and community members alike. We will continue to monitor all three constituencies to ensure that this trend continues. To date, the collaboration between the CCE and ILE has had a dramatic impact in increasing student involvement in both curricular and cocurricular activities, which fall under their respective leadership portfolios. Record numbers of service trips and leadership students speak to the value of the new organizational structure. This is the direct result of the close professional relationship between the two directors and their ability to take advantage of the resources the other offers, to the mutual advantage of both.

Each institution of higher education has its own mission and unique set of circumstances, and it is not the purpose of these reflections to offer a universal template formula for success. Rather, its purpose is simply to note that it behooves all of us in positions of leadership to take advantage of our unique perspectives to continually review what is already happening on our

campuses that effectively enhances our respective missions at the microlevel and do what we can to elevate them to a macro or institutional level. Such a strategy has the advantage of building bridges among various constituencies of the campus community because it acknowledges and rewards those among the faculty and staff most committed to the institutional mission. In this particular instance, it has had the further advantage of building bridges out into the broader community in which the college resides and serves. This has the potential to create a sum-plus environment to which all chief administrators should aspire.



Jack R. Ohle is president of Wartburg College.

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