History of Service and Learning in Higher Education

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Overview

The term ‘service’ in higher education “has been literally evolving for centuries.” (Los Angeles County Office of Education, n.d., p. 1). As we move through the narrative of service and service-learning, it is important to explore the atmosphere in which these two related ideologies developed. Understanding the historical development of higher education as well as the historical context of the United States is paramount to understanding the commitment to service and service-learning in higher education. Institutions committed to the pedagogy of service-learning lay out various accounts of the history of service-learning and contributions of movements, legislation, and influences that have molded the teaching and learning practice into what it is today.

American campuses have embraced the ideologies of civic engagement and service since the 1800s (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2008, para. 1). They gained stronger footing with the Morrill Act in 1962 and with the writings of John Dewy. The time period after the Great Depression and again after World War II bought in monumental service projects that affected the nation and the university campus as well. The 1960s saw the birth of service-learning and 1980s found rejuvenation in service and service-learning initiatives (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2008, para. 1). Federal support began to build for national service-learning programs in the 1990s and 2000s and researchers began to take a serious look into the pedagogy. Today, service-learning is expanding to colleges and universities across the nation and internationally.

History of Service, Learning and Higher Education

Most historians will point to the Morrill Act of 1962 that established land grant colleges as the root of service, philanthropy, and experiential learning in higher education. The legacy of
service began in these institutions in a much earlier period. In 1962, Frederick Rudolph stated that “From the beginning, the American college was cloaked with a public purpose” (as cited in Jacoby, 1996). That public purpose included “academic, social, and cultural purposes” (Harkins, J. P., p. 17) as well as preparing the American citizenry to be civically engaged in public life (Smith as cited in Jacoby, 1996).

Service and civic engagement have roots in the 19th century (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2008, para. 1). In the years of the colonial college, philanthropy efforts mainly focused on Indian populations (Thelin, 2011). Groups that reached out to these ‘savages’ to provide them with a Christian education were “primarily religious and private” (Los Angeles County Office of Education, n.d., p. 1). During the time period from 1785 to 1860, colleges and universities were expanding the curriculum and providing greater access to education for African Americans, American Indians, women, and Roman Catholics (Thelin, 2011).

The importance of service was apparent even before the Morrill Act. Not only were institutions of higher education incorporating service into their mission, but they incorporated “many definitions and approaches […] of linking service and learning” (Sigmond as noted in Jacoby, 1996, p. 1). Although the term ‘service-learning’ did not appear until 1966, the foundations for combining academic learning and service for the community were apparent from the time of conception of American higher education. Senator John Dewy described the integration of civic engagement and learning as a natural fit in his Benefits of Service-Learning article in 2001:

By its very definition, civic responsibility means taking a healthy role in the life of one’s community. That means that classroom lessons should be complimented by work outside
the classroom. Service-learning does just that, tying community service to academic learning. (Glenn, 2001, Harvard Education Letter, p. 1)

Foundations of Service and Learning: The Land Grant Act and John Dewy

By the 19th century, higher education institutions were used “as an instrument of government policy, to train the population, and to provide leaders and responsible citizenry” (Harkins, J. P., p. 17). The great expansion of higher education in the 1860s and on into the 1910s set up much of the foundation to what would eventually become service-learning. The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1962 is seen by most historians of service-learning as the forerunner to modern-day service-learning programs. The act successfully combined college student’s studies and professors expertise with the nation’s focus on agriculture, engineering, and military. Barbara Jacoby (1996) believed that “In 1862 the passage of the Land-Grant Act inexorably linked higher education and the concept of service.” (p. 11).

In the 1880s through 1910, higher education experienced major growth and philanthropy toward institution building (Thelin, 2100). During almost the same time period, 1890 to 1920, the American government was practicing a Laissez-Faire type of approach to the American economy and most federal regulations. By 1903, John Dewey was laying out the intellectual foundations of service-learning. He promoted the idea that “children should learn by experience giving them the opportunity to develop skills, habits and attitudes necessary to solve a wide variety of problems” (as noted by Spartacus Educational, Frasco, n.d.) Dewy also promoted the ideal that learning environments should be accessible and inclusive to students of all genders, races, and economic status and they should work together to solve community issues (Frasco, n.d., p. 1).
In the words of Woodrow Wilson, former President of both the United States and Princeton University, that “It is not learning but the spirit of service that will give a college a place in the annals of the nation” (Boyer cited in Jacoby, 1996, p. 3). It is in that same spirit that educator Arthur Dunn promoted service to the community as central to his course curriculum. He utilized the community to engage students in his community civics course in 1904 to “identify community problems, then develop and apply solutions” (Los Angeles County Office of Education, n.d., p. 3).

Other major developments for service, civic engagement, and higher education for the period included the Cooperative Education Movement (Titlebaum, Williamson, Daprano, Baer, & Brahler, 2004). Started in 1906 at the University of Cincinnati, cooperative education is similar to service-learning in that it is a “structured method of combining classroom-based education with practical work experience” (Cooperative Education & Internship Association, 2013). Unlike service-learning cooperative education is more so based on the school-to-work transition as it is on the specific content of a single course. By 1914, the Cooperative Education Movement had taken off and was established nationally by the Smith Level Act of 1914 (Titlebaum et al., 2004).

The Great Depression and Post World War II Era

While colleges and universities were experiencing a period of expansion and reform, “success and excess” in the 1920s through 1945, the nation was struggling with national issues such as the Great Depression and World War II (Thelin, 2011, p. 205). In the 1930s and 1940s, Franklin Roosevelt enacted several programs that furthered the foundations of service-learning and created the GI Bill linking service and education. As part of the New Deal and recovery from the Depression, Franklin D. Roosevelt enacted the Emergency Conservation Work Act in 1933.
(Titlebaum et al., 2004). The act created the Civilian Conservation Corps whose goal was “to curtail the destruction and erosion of the country’s natural resources” and provided millions of unemployed young men with vocational and on the job training (Frasco, n.d., p. 3). Two years later, FDR created the Work Projects Administration in 1935 to put millions of unemployed people to work on public works projects (Titlebaum et al., 2004).

FDR’s New Deal policies put many unemployed people back to work and helped the economy recover, but it was not until World War II that the national economy turned around. Barbara Jacoby stated that “During World War II, research universities joined with the government to create solutions to new problems” (Jacoby, p. 11). It was during this time that the federal government saw the value in higher education research and that this research could be utilized to help the American public (Thelin, 2011)

This time period after World War II was known as the “Golden Age” of American higher education (Thelin, 2011, p.260). In the period after 1945, the federal government “poured funds into higher education to educate veterans, fund medical research, and support service programs” (Harkins, J. P., p. 18 as noted in Spring, 2011). Part of the reason for the success of higher education institutions in this time period revolves around the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act. In 1944, FDR signed the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act, more commonly known as the GI Bill. The bill “linked service and education to those members of our voluntary military” (Frasco, n.d., p. 2). Federal research dollars also played a big part in the success of universities and colleges, but also brought a burden of guiding higher education public policy, restrictions on funding, and federal intrusion into ‘academic freedom’ (Thelin, 2011)

The 1960s and 1970s: Laying the Ground Work
The Los Angeles County of Education describes the time period of the 1960s and 1970s by asserting “The Civil Rights Movement and the War on Poverty in the 1960’s and 70’s led by a number of grassroots movements provided the impetus for community involvement” (Los Angeles County Office of Education, n.d., p. 3) This was a time period that truly jump-started the service-learning movement. In the 1960s, “civil rights and poverty were national concerns and the federal government made education part of a national campaign against poverty” (Harkins, J. P., p. 18). Educators in this environment were challenged “to create innovative learning methods that encompassed logic-centered experiential types of learning (Harkins, J. P., p. 18).

John F. Kennedy was inaugurated in January of 1961. One of his first official acts was to create the Peace Corps in that same year which provided benefits to Americans who were willing to serve abroad. JFK is famously quoted as saying “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country” (Los Angeles County Office of Education, n.d., p. 1). Barbara Jacoby (1996) points out that “College student community service […] grew […] in the 1960s, inspired by President John F. Kennedy’s launching of the Peace Corps in 1961. Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) followed in 1965” which was created by JFK’s predecessor, Lyndon B. Johnson (p. 11). VISTA can be viewed as the ‘domestic Peace Corps’ and also provides benefits, including student financial benefits, for people willing to serve their communities. Also in 1965, the College Work-study program is established which promotes on-campus jobs for students who show financial need.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, service-learning “established itself and flourished on many college campuses” (Jacoby, p. 12). In the 1960s, “early pioneers of the service-learning movement began to emerge and attempted to combine ‘service’ and ‘learning’ in a direct and
powerful way” (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2008, para. 1). A Tennessee Valley Authority-funded project was the first time that the term service-learning had been utilized in an official document in 1966 (Titlebaum et al., 2004). Ironically enough a year later, Robert Sigmon and William Ramsey coined the phrase service-learning to describe “the combination of conscious educational growth with the accomplishment of certain tasks that met genuine human needs” (Frasco, n.d., para. 4). Between then and now, many federal and state programs have been enacted that have promoted service, higher education, and service learning within the academy.

At one of the first popular conferences focused on service-learning in Atlanta in 1969, cleverly named the Atlanta Service-Learning Conference, conference participants put forth several recommendations. The most important of these recommendations was that “Colleges and universities should encourage students to participate in community service, help make sure that academic learning is part of that service, and to give academic recognition for that learning” (History of Service-Learning in Higher Education: Service and Service-Learning on College and University Campuses, para. 2).

National attention for service-learning continued in the 1970s. In 1971, the White House Conference on Youth report called for greater linkages of service and learning. Multiple agencies outside of federal organizations were opened in the 1970s, including the National Center for Public Service Internships, as well as the Society for Field Experience Education - merged in 1978 to become the National Society for Internships and Experimental Education (Titlebaum et al., 2004). The National Society for Internships and Experimental Education “became a distributor for the considerable written resources on service-learning” (Jacoby, p. 12). Although service-learning was introduced to college campuses in the 1960s and 1970s, and received
overwhelming federal and public support, the mid-1980s showed an increase in popularity. (Frasco, n.d.).

The 1980s: Developing Service-Learning as a Pedagogy

The 1980s saw an increased amount of government involvement in forming public and private partnerships to address local and national issues (Los Angeles County Office of Education, n.d., p. 2). At the same time, “service learning emerged on the educational scene as a viable solution to bridging the gap between academic achievement and the value of service and volunteerism” (Los Angeles County Office of Education, n.d., p. 2). The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse describes both federal and public efforts in service and service learning in the following way:

National service efforts were launched across the country, including the Campus Outreach Opportunity League (1984), which helps mobilize service programs in higher education; the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (1985), which helps replicate youth corps in the states and cities; National Youth Leadership Council (1982), which helps to prepare future leaders; and Youth Service America (1985), through which many young people are given a chance to serve. (History of Service-Learning in Higher Education: Service and Service-Learning on College and University Campuses, para. 4)

It was not just the federal government creating these programs; it was universities themselves, recent graduates, and individuals that were helping shape the service-learning movement. University presidents got together in 1985 and formed the National Campus Compact (Titlebaum et al., 2004). Recent graduates had formed the Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL)” in 1984 (Jacoby, p. 14). Additionally, researchers and theorists
such as David Kolb were writing publications such as his 1984 novel Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development. Conferences were also springing up revolving around service-learning. In 1989 the Wingspread conference produced *Principles of Good Practice in Combining Service and Learning* (Jacoby, p. 14). These various entities shaped, and continue to shape, the field of service-learning.

**The 1990s and early 2000s: Building Federal Support**

The federal government took a substantial leap in support of service-learning in the early 1990s. Barbara Jacoby (1996) notes that “The federal government’s interest in and support of service-learning increased substantially in the 1990s with the passage of the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1990” (p. 16). The National Community Service Act “officially endorsed and provided funds to support service-learning” (Los Angeles County Office of Education, n.d., p. 4). The Higher Education Amendments of 1992 required higher education institutions to allocate 5 percent of their federal work-study program funds “must be used to compensate students engaged in community service” (p. 16) Today the program is referred to at some institutions as Community Service Federal Work Study positions, available to student who have not yet met their financial ‘estimated need’ (Jacoby, 1996). In 1993, President Clinton approved the National and Community Service Trust Act which created the Corporation for National and Community Service (Los Angeles County Office of Education, n.d., p. 3).

The 1990s have also seen an uptick in the amount of literature, research, and conferences focusing on service-learning (Jacoby, 1996). Articles, books, and journals began to emerge on service-learning as a result (Frasco, n.d., p. 4). The *Michigan Journal for Community Service-Learning* was established in 1994 by the University of Michigan, followed shortly after by the *Journal for Higher Education, Outreach and Engagement* by the University of Georgia.
(Titlebaum et al., 2004). As service-learning gained momentum from federal law and university support across the nation, some programs started to make service-learning a graduation requirement. In the late 1990s, California State University Monterey Bay became the first comprehensive state university requiring service-learning for graduation (Titlebaum et al., 2004). As more and more institutions choose service-learning and other experiential forms of learning as their preferred pedagogy, we must look to the future to how the pedagogy will adapt and survive.

**Service-Learning Administration in Higher Education**

Greater numbers of higher education institutions are incorporating service-learning into their undergraduate programs (Jacoby, 1996). These programs exist in a variety of forms and a “wide range of levels of institutional commitment” (Jacoby, p. 18). When service-learning is a high priority at an institution, service-learning is typically integrated into the mission. At such institutions, the service-learning program is generally located within the Office of Academic Affairs (Jacoby, pp. 18-19). At other institutions service-learning programs are housed in student affairs or student activities offices, career centers, internship offices, or academic departments (Jacoby, 1996). Service-learning is “by no means restricted to four year institutions […] almost sixty percent of community colleges offer some form of service-learning courses” (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2008, para. 1)

**Effect on Higher Education**

Today, service and service-learning are hitting a “fourth wave” of civic engagement initiatives in higher education and there is currently a “push toward a fully-engaged university as a whole” (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2008, para. 7). When an institution can combine service and learning, they add “value to each and transforms both” (Porter, Honnet, and
Poulsen as noted in Jacoby, 1996). One anonymous student said of service-learning that “Service learning is taking an altruistic attitude towards your community and at the same time, looking introspectively at your beliefs, convictions, and prejudices” (Anonymous as cited in Lukenchuk, Jagla, & Eigel, n.d.). The goal of the service-learning pedagogy is to expand the consciousness of the student and also be reciprocal. It should be a win-win-win-win for the student, faculty member, community, and institution.

Future of Service-Learning: Building the Culture

Ernest Boyer (as noted in Jacoby, 1996) urges colleges and universities to “respond to the challenges that confront our children, our schools, and our cities, just as land-grant colleges responded to the needs of agriculture and industry a century ago” (p. 48). As the metamorphosis of service and service-learning unfolds, higher education administrators need to be prepared for the challenges that lie ahead. Service-learning and other experiential types of teaching and learning can be means to obtain their goals or recruiting, retaining, and graduating their students (Jacoby, 1996). As Derek Bok said in 1982, “There is no reason for universities to feel uncomfortable in taking account of society’s needs; in fact, they have a clear obligation to do so” (as noted by Jacoby, 1996)

Challenges of Service-Learning Administrators in the Future

Service-learning administrators have a tough task at hand for the future. They must build on the momentum of their predecessors, but at the same time evolve and advance the field. Administrators in the field have to take a serious look at risk management issues when students are traveling off campus to engage in official, university-sanctioned activities. If a student is to get hurt on a service site, or traveling to the site, a lack of legal precedent will make the case hard to predict the outcome.
Additionally, service-learning has gone global. The first international service-learning research conference was held in 2001. This would require experiential educators and administrators to think harder about globalization and international education challenges. International issues, and even domestically, service-learning programs have to be inclusive and promote diversity among experiences and the people students are interacting with. Community partners must be chosen carefully for reasons of diversity, accountability, and risk management standpoints.

The final challenge for experiential and service-learning administrators is the rise of online and distance education. How as administrators, faculty, and academicians can we include online experiential learning opportunities? Online service-learning is on the rise and leaders in the field will have to solve this critical question posed above. If we are to move forward with service and service-learning ventures, we must adapt to education in this digital age.
References


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