# Beyond the "Publish or Perish" Philosophy A Method for Quantifying University-Based Service

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Many academicians incorporate service learning projects in their course curriculum, yet they have few means by which to present this material in annual review and tenure reports. Likewise, administrators are also concerned with quantifying and measuring assessment among their programs. With the assessment issue becoming increasingly more important, higher education institutions must address techniques for evaluating "service," which typically does not get much attention. Although service is quietly ranked third behind scholarship (e.g., research and publication) and teaching, many academicians in the communication field will agree that a large portion of their time is committed to serviceoriented activities given the applied nature of the discipline. This study examines one method for quantifying service learning using the analogy of an agency model with billable hours to generate an economic impact statement for service-oriented projects. Results from student interviews are also included to provide a measure of student outcomes relevant to the incorporation of service learning projects as a form of pedagogy.

Across the country, much attention is given to the documentation of teaching and research activities at universities and colleges. While debate continues over the effectiveness of various methods, the means for evaluating these two classic missions of universities are fairly well established. Research is judged by numbers of conference papers, journal articles and books, while teaching is reflected in student and peer evaluations. The third prong of the academic tradition mission is service. However, service-related work is often included in a broad consulting category that generally gets noted during annual evaluations. The need to identify means by which to both qualify and quantify service components provided university faculty continues to be a concern, especially when one considers that annual assessment efforts are increasingly being mandated by states across the country. Moreover, service often crosses various areas, including teaching, research and personal development (Mettetal & Bryant, 1996).

A decade ago the issues of both assessment and service learning were characterized by McDaniel (1994) as "megatrends," portraying a paradigm shift in academia. He identified four trends: total quality management, intrinsic motivation (re-evaluating reward systems), authentic assessment and service learning. He placed special emphasis on service learning: Service learning will shift our models of the college curriculum in ways that will require faculty members to reconsider how we are to relate the goals of liberal learning to applied areas of "service" and to design curriculum that integrates the theory and practice of service learning by balancing field experiences with academic experiences. Professors will also need to develop more flexible schedules and assignments to accommodate individual interests and to coordinate academic knowledge and skills with human relations and communication skills required in service learn-

The purpose of this study is to examine a studentfaculty project, defined as "service learning," in order to determine a tangible way for assessing and evaluating service. The method uses an agency paradigm as a means of estimating economic benefits derived by one nonprofit organization. Public relations students enrolled in a one-credit-hour practical field experience provided publicity opportunities for a local blood drive.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

As stated in the literature (e.g., McLeod, 2001; Checkoway, 2000; Lubbers, 2000; Maloney, 2000; Spanier, 2000; Arthur, 1998; King, 1997; Zemsky, Shaman & Iannozzi, 1997; Cartwright, 1996), postsecondary institutions offer viable proving grounds for which to incorporate civic engagement and service learning-oriented activities. In fact, many argue that it is one of our inherent responsibilities as educators. McLeod (2001) coins the term "communiversity" to represent a connection between an institution and its community; it converges the goals of many publics, including university faculty, staff, students, civic groups and local governments, to name a few.

In assessing the body of literature relative to service learning, Shumer and Belbas (1996) explain: "The literature suggests, indeed, that service learning is both a philosophy and a methodology." Generally, service learning is identified as the latter with emphasis on "personal growth of the service providers, especially in areas of self-esteem and social responsibility." Service learning theory begins with the assumption that experience is the foundation for learning; and various forms of community service are employed as the experiential basis for learning (Morton & Troppe, 1996).

Service learning encompasses a number of activities, ranging in scope from class projects to internships. However, service learning does not have to be associated with a particular professional field, as is the case of peer tutoring. Service learning's definition can be extended to include community-based learning, such as participation in a field trip or internship, which is not tied directly into "service" per se.

Kraft (1996) identifies classroom-based projects as a predominant form of service learning with the following qualifications: "carefully tied to curricular objectives, contain academic content, involve the student in reflection, and contain an evaluative component." Without such criteria, these experiences would be better classified as community-based learning or volunteerism, according to Kraft. Bringle and Hatcher (1996) suggest an even more explicit definition: the experience must emphasize the service component and its civic lessons. Criteria specified by Mettetal and Bryant (1996) include selecting activities that contribute to learning goals, offer a community service, and provide a basis for applied research by which students link theory to practice and faculty obtain data for subsequent analysis and publication. Hence, service teaching and research missions become a collaborative effort.

Herein, the less stringent definition of service learning will be used. Two assumptions are relevant to this study: some learning is inherent in the process of serving regardless of whether that service entails a professional orientation; direct reflection on civic lessons cannot be graded in the context of some courses. The focus, then, is as described by Mettetal and Bryant (1996): "Service learning projects are a means to teach new professionals and, at the same time, to address relevant social concerns." However, though definitions may vary, the literature agrees that certain components should be evident among successful service learning programs: community voice, orientation and training, meaningful action, reflection, and evaluation (Jacoby, 1996; Campus

One of the underlying assumptions of service learning is that it translates into long-lasting learning (Kohls,

ed based upon editorial board evaluations of relevance to public relations education. importance to public relations teaching, quality of writing, manuscript organization, appropriateness of conclusions and teaching suggestions, and adequacy of the information, evidence or data pre-sented. Papers selected for the PRD's top teaching session at AEJMC's national convention and meeting TPR's publication guidelines can be published without further review if edited to a maximum of 3.000 words. Authors of teaching papers selected for other PRD sessions are also encouraged to submit their papers electronically for the regular review process. For mail submissions, four hard copies of each manuscript must be submitted. Names of authors should not be listed on the manuscript itself. A detachable title page should include the author's title, office address, telephone number, fax number and e-mail address. Final manuscript must be in a readable 9-point type or larger and total no more than 3,000 words, including title, author, footnotes, tables, charts and attachments. Upon final attachments. Upon final acceptance of a manuscript. the author is expected to provide a plain text e-mail version to the PR Update editor. Back issues of TPR are available on the PRD website

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1996). While research indicates that service learning, including the projects associated with a class, can enhance learning outcomes, further investigation in this area is still needed. Examinations should not be limited to only the impact service learning has on students but also on those organizations that reap the service-oriented benefits.

Research in this field also needs to address other parties involved in the experiential equation. In particular, academic and site supervisors, and the community or community-based organization that benefits from the service learning projects and activities, should also be included in these studies. Mettetal and Bryant (1996) demonstrate how service learning projects have empowered students, faculty, the community and the university. Student benefits included obtaining undergraduate research grants, presenting conference papers, pursuing graduate degrees, and having a general feeling of "doing good." However, the students recognized the disadvantages of these projects as well; they stated that they were time-consuming and that they had to work with "unpleasant people." Faculty benefits included obtaining research data used for grants, conference papers presentations and journal publication opportunities. The community, of course, benefited from the services provided, as did the university because it fulfilled part of its overarching mission – to serve the community

Similarly, assessment must consider the various interfaces that affect student outcomes and, subsequently, the perceived effectiveness of institutions of higher education. Haley and Jackson (1995) highlight some of these interfaces by describing one program's assessment methods. They outline four evaluation categories: program components (including class evaluations and peer reviews), graduating students, internal and external constituents, and the comprehensive program (such as accreditation).

Service learning engages schools in multiple interfaces while allowing students to apply professional skills to community groups in need. Hence, if creative and practical means for documenting and measuring service learning exists, it then provides a technique for linking a program's assessment strategies to the broader institutional mission. Questions posed as a means for evaluating assessment efforts are also applicable to evaluating service learning projects: "Are the students developing the kind of leadership qualities that will help them become productive and effective professionals?" "Are our assessment methods a valid description of the real experience of the students, faculty, and important external constituencies?" (Haley & Jackson, 1995). Fulmer (1996) discusses general program development and evaluation and specifies that departmental planners should define the department's mission "in a manner that is both useful and politically expedient: How will the department serve its majors and assess such service in a meaningful fashion?"

Cole (1996) discusses how program evaluation is closely linked to assessment and institutional planning. Other authors have also examined assessment and planning in relation to service learning. Graham, Bourland-Davis and Fulmer (1996) investigated how one public relations program used internship analysis as one means of assessment. While internships can be classified as service learning in some cases, few researchers have reported means by which various university mass media and communication programs can incorporate service learning components in an assessment program or how they can quantify service learning efforts.

In "A Port of Entry," the report of the Commission on Public Relations Education (1999), commission members recommend that the public relations curricula should enable students to become competent in an array of skills and industry specialties, including community relations. They also stress the importance of offering students the opportunity to actually implement what they have learned in the classroom via projects as campaigns, meetings and workshops, crises and isolated incidents, organizational activities, and special events. Further, the commission strongly recommends that students have an opportunity to engage in supervised work experience (e.g., field experience, internships) in the public relations industry while they are still in school. Considering the kinds of experience civic engagement-oriented activities provide students, coupled with the commission's recommendations, a public relations curricula provides an ideal "home" for such relationship-building activities between the students and various organizations within their communities. Other recommendations related to the future of public relations education, based on the commission's reports, are referenced in an article by Kruckeberg (1998). Myriad researchers have investigated service learning in relation to class projects. For example, Lubbers (2000) gives an overview of the service learning literature; he highlights key concepts and provides a variety of resources for public relations educators. Fall (1998) demonstrates using the management-by-objectives evaluation strategy to assess the success of students who are taxed with the assignment to develop campus-wide fundraising during a special event management course. Tilson (1999) also writes about another citizenship formation campaign experience in which students are assigned to raise community awareness for a local community hospital program. Likewise, Daugherty (2002) and Corbett & Kendall (1999) investigate student perceptions regarding service learning-based programs. Clark (1998) discusses the integration of service learning in a corporate communications curricula. And Sallot's (1996) description of the bottom line impact of a particular public relations campaigns class, which adopted the university as a service-learning client. Results included that the program itself became beneficiary – with the funding of a class lab.

From the literature, two research questions were addressed during this study. *RQ1*: How can a student-faculty project be used as a means for quantifying, evaluating and assessing service-oriented activities? *RQ2*: How do students engaged in a service learning project perceive its value in relation to their individual personal and professional needs?

## **METHOD**

Students enrolled in a one-credit class were asked to participate in this study based on work they planned and implemented for a blood drive for the local Red Cross chapter. Student participation entailed logging hours analogous to public relations agency work conducted for clients. The students understood that participation was voluntary and that the actual work completed for the client – not the hours logged – would serve as the basis for their grades.

The National and Community Service Act of 1990 defines service learning as having four criteria, all of which were met in this case. First, the students in the course worked on a project that met actual community needs and was coordinated in collaboration with the university and the community. Second, the project was integrated in the curriculum and allowed the students to write about and discuss what they had participated in and observed during the service activities. Third, the project allowed students to use newly acquired public relations skills in a "real-life" situation. And finally, the knowledge the students gained from the service learning project enhanced what they were learning in the classroom and extended their skills to the community, aiding them in developing a sense of caring for others (Cohen & Kinsey, 1994).

The five students in this course were responsible only for designing and implementing the publicity and promotional components of the spring campus blood drive. Any logistical planning, such as coordinating room set-up, generating volunteers, and scheduling nurses for the blood drive, was done by the client. The students possessed various levels of public relations knowledge. Three of them were seniors and two were juniors. Four were public relations students; one was an English major earning a minor in public relations. Based on each student's strengths and classes completed, the instructor let the student group determine who would be responsible for completing what tasks instead of delegating individual assignments.

Students were given the direction to log their time to the corresponding activities in which they engaged. This was required for several reasons. First, documentation enabled the researchers to evaluate the students' timesheets from a public relations professional standpoint in terms of whether reasonable time amounts were reported for particular tasks such as writing a news release or memoranda. In short, it was important to determine if time spent on a task was comparable to time for which an agency could realistically bill a client. Second, data from the timesheet reports could then be converted into agency billable hours multiplied by a reasonable agency per hour fee. Using Kelly's "Figure Your Fees" (1996), one of the coauthor's public relations agency experience and salary estimations from practitioners in the local public relations industry, approximations of the actual costs for the publicity service were determined. This total determined the fee the nonprofit group would have had to pay for professional services and the equivalence of the economic value of the service learning project.

Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted, allowing for follow-up examination of the students' attitudes and overall evaluation of service learning. Thus, this method served as a means to assess

the pedagogical value of service learning. These interviews also provided the researchers with the opportunity to check for differences in evaluations based on subsequent experience in the field since two of the five students were also completing internship requirements.

#### **RESULTS**

## ASSESSING THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF SERVICE LEARNING

In order to address RQ1, which concerns how a student-faculty project can be used as a means for quantifying, evaluating and assessing service-oriented activities, timesheet reports were tallied according to student tasks. In so doing, tasks emerged to create five key categories of work: writing assignments, follow-through, meeting time, miscellaneous project work (non-writing) and on-site work. An estimated total of 16 hours was spent on writing projects, to include a publicity proposal, press releases, public service announcements, direct mail letters to student organizations, memoranda to faculty and staff, feature stories, weekly progress reports for the instructor, and a follow-up media analysis report for the client.

An estimated total of 12 hours was spent on follow-through and follow-up projects. These tasks included making telephone calls to the media and other campus and community contacts, verifying addresses and contacts, addressing and stuffing envelopes, purchasing supplies, and announcing the blood drive date at various student meetings.

Under the task grouping of miscellaneous project work, two duties were logged: posting flyers and a banner, along with removal of signage after the event. Students spent approximately 17 hours completing them.

Meetings constituted another category. The class met each week for one hour for eight weeks throughout the 10-week term. The students did not meet during the ninth week because they worked on-site at the blood drive that week. During the 10th week, they did not meet as a group but were responsible for turning in individual follow-up reports. One student was responsible for writing the final media analysis follow-up report for the client. Each student missed one class meeting. The amount of required class time totaled 35 hours. However, each student reported that he or she spent an average of two additional hours outside of the class meeting with practicum members for various reasons. This increased the meeting total to 45 hours. Typically, an agency bills the client for meeting time, whether it be a planning or creative brainstorming session or even to meet with the client to go over details of the project.

On-site work represented the fifth category. Each student was required to work the sign-in table for at least two hours on the day of the blood drive. In total, the students worked 15 hours that day.

Based on the time reported by each of the students, a total of approximately 105 hours was spent to develop, design and implement the publicity, promotional and media relations opportunities for the blood drive. If an agency representative were to take on this project, the hourly fee would most likely be at least \$50. The average fee range in the southeastern, non-metro area is \$50-100 an hour, depending on the skill level necessary for the projects and tasks at hand. For example, agency executives would not charge as much for writing a standard press release as they would for writing a report that entailed much research, interviewing and follow-up. Regarding the students, a base hourly fee of \$5 an hour was used to calculate their billable hours. Since a base fee normally includes a mark-up of two to three times, \$10 was judged to be a reasonable billing rate for student practitioners operating without overhead. Thus, the final student agency fee, if the students had billed the client, would have totaled \$1,050 (105 hours x \$10 per hour). It should be noted that a practitioner would not need to spend quite as many hours on the project as the students did. Since the practitioner is more skilled and experienced in completing writing projects, he or she would be able to get projects done more quickly. However, the practitioner's hourly base fee would be at least five times the hourly fee used to calculate the students' time.

After reviewing the tasks the students completed, a validation check was conducted by one of the authors who has carried out an array of agency projects. She determined how many approximate hours she believed it would have taken her to complete promotional tasks for a blood drive. She estimated that she would have spent about 30 hours on the various assignments and another six hours working the check-in table the day of the blood drive. Additionally, she would have had to hire at least one other person to work a six-

hour shift during the event, bringing her total billable hours to 42. The students spent a total of 70 hours (not including the required 35 hours of planning time they spent during class). In the estimations, she indicated that she would charge only \$10 an hour for on-site participation, while other work would be billed at \$50 an hour. As such, professional practitioner costs would have been a minimum of \$1,620 (\$1,500 for 30 hours, and \$120 for 12 hours on-site work). The \$570 difference between the student rate of \$1,050 and the practitioner rate of \$1,620 would have been absorbed had the professor's time in counseling, meeting with the client, and editing the various materials been included in the student billable hours time estimates.

The end result of this study is that the nonprofit organization benefited from at least \$1,000 worth of volunteer professional service, a realistic figure when compared to estimates for an agency practitioner to have performed the same work. While more students in the class may have offset these results, less time would have been spent by others on various individual tasks. Moreover, comparing and/or contrasting the student versus professional rates allows for a validity check as to whether rates are perceived to be realistic.

### ASSESSING THE PEDAGOGICAL VALUE OF SERVICE LEARNING

In addition to determining the billable hours, or in effect, creating an economic impact statement based on the savings that were accrued by the community-based organization, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with the students the following term. These results address RQ2, which examines how students engaged in a service learning project perceive its value in relation to their individual personal and professional needs. The interviews included questions that asked students to evaluate the value of their time spent participating in the project and the personal results and benefits they achieved from the participation. Students were also asked to define service learning and how it compares and contrasts with other pedagogical methods. Generally, students indicated that the writing activities took more time. Class meetings took the least amount of time and were perceived as less productive. While the students perceived class meetings as wasteful, they still recognized that the meetings were necessary for planning and coordination purposes.

Student benefits consistently pointed to the professional portfolio material obtained. Yet, benefits were also mentioned when the
students were asked to define service learning. Generally, the
students reported their satisfaction in helping other people. One
student commented on the satisfaction of seeing the finished product.
She said it was exciting to know that the people attending the blood
drive were there, in part, because of her involvement in the publicity and promotional efforts. Another student defined service learning
as "... something that stays with you forever; it is not so easy to forget something you actually worked on." This statement supports
service learning, both philosophically and pedagogically, as longlasting learning. Other benefits related to the nonprofit organization
also surfaced. Students reported that they learned a lot about the Red
Cross, about the importance of documenting what they did, about
nonprofit groups in general, and specifically, about how this organization "helps people directly."

When students were asked to define service learning and compare it to other forms of pedagogy, several commented about the value of learning from their mistakes: "We saw what would and wouldn't work," and, "In service learning, it's OK to have a right or wrong way of doing things because it's ongoing." In short, students seemed more apt to take risks and learn from their mistakes in a service learning environment. Apparently, they understood that they could try other means if one did not work, which is something that they said could not be attempted by means of the more traditional pedagogical techniques such as taking tests and writing research papers. The opportunity to explore using different communication tactics and try different techniques is further underscored in one student's comment: "Lectures convey information from professor to student through conversation. More importantly, though, service learning conveys information from professor to student through action."

## **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

Detailing an approximate \$1,000 professional billing equivalency in service work for one specific project emphasizes the benefits provided by the students for a nonprofit group. These benefits are multiplied if one considers the numbers of classes that incorporate

various service learning components throughout the academic year. Student feedback from this study indicates recognition that service learning, as a form of pedagogy, provides a long-term, meaningful learning opportunity. In terms of personal growth, students recognized that learning from their mistakes positively impacts their self-esteem. Various social responsibility issues emerged in their comments related to helping people. One student indicated that he planned to continue participating in service work, in addition to his career, upon graduation.

While this agency model method for ascertaining an economic impact of service learning projects provides quantifiable data to be used by both faculty members as well as administrators, it also has inherent limitations, some of which can easily be framed as opportunities. The first limitation is that the equation only superficially highlights the professor's role. While the literature encourages, and this study supports, service learning as a critical tool for teaching and learning, future research should examine the cost-benefit ratio of faculty time versus student learning: "Service learning is a relationship- and time-intensive pedagogy for both students and faculty."

Another limitation of relying only on economic impact statements is that they do not directly reflect the quality the students and the benefiting community group (e.g., the Red Cross) experience. This limitation can easily be turned into an opportunity by incorporating "authentic assessment," or using a holistic approach in evaluation. In the future, students enrolled in this one-credit class could be required to create a portfolio that includes published materials, memos, timelines, written objectives and budgets. The class portfolio need not be required for every service learning project in a particular program but could, instead, be assigned at random to various classes throughout the academic year. Further, at the end of the term, contacts/clients at the benefiting organization with whom the students had worked could be asked to evaluate the students' participation and work quality and to provide reactions to the service cost estimations. In many cases, site contacts are more than willing to write letters of commendation, which can also be included in the students' portfolios. These additional methods create greater opportunity for feedback so that the faculty member, administrators and clients involved can evaluate various service learning components and determine future opportunities.

In addition to using these methods for internal reporting purposes, it is recommended that the results be made public beyond just the department, college or university. The community should be made aware of these contributions, as should other students, faculty and key institutional audiences such as the media, alumni and government officials. Presenting the results in scholarship settings such as at conferences and in academic journals can assist the academic community in learning more about service learning and assessment strategies (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996).

While the service learning project discussed in this paper focuses on publicity efforts of a public relations class, the agency analogy (economic impact premise) is readily adaptable for other mass media and communication programs and can be incorporated among an array of course curricula. Writer's Market includes freelance estimates for business, technical and feature writing, educational and literary services, as well as audiovisuals and electronic communications, to name just a few communication-oriented tasks. Many agencies provide services ranging from speech training and videotaping to strategic and crisis planning, media relations and fundraising. These agencies can be contacted to help in the determination of an initial fee base for estimations of economic impact of various service learning class-based projects.

Additionally, this agency-based formula, then, can provide a basis for annual assessment and/or evaluations for professors' personal or class experiences with service work. With time analysis of several projects, reasonable time estimations can be made on an annual basis so that the economic benefits of service work and service learning projects can be approximated, summarized and documented in individual, departmental and college-wide reports. The financial base provides a quantitative measure for a university's "service" component and can be further supported qualitatively with feedback from the students and organization benefiting from the work produced.

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