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 service-oriented 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.

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.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY IS TO EXAMINE A STUDENT-ACADEMY 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), post-secondary 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 “communitivity” 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.

Service learning is identified as the latter with emphasis on community voice, orientation and training, meaningful action, reflection, and evaluation (Jacoby, 1996: Campus Compact).

One of the underlying assumptions of service learning is that it translates into long-lasting learning (Kohls, R. et al., 1996). A Method for Quantifying University-Based Service

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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. Mettel et al. (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 comprehensiveness of the assessment conducted.

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 be productive and influential 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?”

Corbett & Kendall (1999) investigate student perceptions regarding projects associated with a class, can enhance learning outcomes, further investigating what tasks instead of delegating individual assignments. 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 juniors and two were seniors. Four were public relations students; one was an English major earning a minor in public relations.

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 memorandum. 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 author’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.
the pedagogical value of service learning. These interviews also pro-
vided 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 fol-
low-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 aver-
age of two additional hours outside of the class meeting with practi-
cum site personnel. The students spent an average of two additional
hours outside of the class meeting with practitioners. An appor-
tionate $1,000 was also included to cover the $100 for 12 hours on-site
work. 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 imple-
ment 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 pro-
ject 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 prac-
titioner 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 ser-
vice, 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, creat-
ing an economic impact statement based on the savings that were
accredited by the community-based organization, the researchers con-
ducted 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 indi-
vidual personal and professional needs. The interviews included
questions that asked students to evaluate the 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 peda-
agogical 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.

Benefits related to the nonprofit organization 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 organi-
ization “helps people directly.”

When students were asked to define service learning and com-
pare 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 ser-
vice 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 stu-
dent’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 equivalen-
tcy 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 groups (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 term, but could be, instead, assigned at random to various courses 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. Many cases, sites 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 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.