

Service-learning and Retention

What we know from and where we go from here

Dan Forbes, M.S.W.

Director of Service Education

Meelia Center for Community Service

Saint Anselm College



Reasons we need to pay attention to Retention

- 1. Decline in overall enrollment: lost students reduces tuition income (Bringle & Hatcher, 2010)
- 2. Ethical responsibility: good faith effort to support admitted students (Bringle & Hatcher, 2010)
- 3. Lowers morale (Bringle & Hatcher, 2010)
- 4. Disruption to student life (those leaving and left behind)
- 5.



6.

Introductions and What is your interest in Service- Learning and Retention?



During the presentation part
write down the retention issues
and factors most relevant to
your school or campus



Research on Retention

- Only 51 % of students who enrolled at four-year institutions in 1995–96 completed a bachelor’s degree within six years at the institution at which they started. Another 7% obtained a baccalaureate degree within six years after attending two or more institutions (Berkner, He & Cataldi, 2002).
- For Community Colleges less than ½ of the students in developmental classes persist. (Prentice, 2009)
- Most vulnerable group is first year students (Bringle & Hatcher, 2010)
- The six-year completion rate for African American students and Latinos is only about 46 percent (Berkner et al., 2002). Yet minority enrollment is on the increase:
 - Minority student age population to increase from 20% ('85) to 39% (2020)
 - 80% of minorities will attend predominately White institutions



Factors that Influence Retention

(from Bringle & Hatcher, 2010)

- I. Individual Characteristics
 - Family background, personality, past educational experiences)
- II. Institutional Characteristics
 - Size, type, quality, control
- III. Student's interactions at College
 - Social interaction, academic integration



Student-level retention variables

- High school achievement
- SES
- Commitment to earn a degree
- Social and academic involvement

- Service-learning can influence commitment and involvement



Institutional Retention Variables

- Structural aspects
 - Past research assessed the impact of size, control, selectivity, and financial aid on retention
- Peer Aspects
 - Peer SES, peer high school GPA
 - Institutional retention climate, as defined by a student body's aggregated report of withdrawal intentions



Institutional Retention Variables

Peer Aspects (cont)

- In a study of college freshmen attending Williams College, Zimmerman (2003) found that students with average standardized test scores were most influenced by having a roommate with a low SAT score which resulted in their achievement in college going down and conversely, being exposed to a roommate with high SAT scores corresponded with academic achievement raising for the student with the initial average SAT score.
 - Important Consideration for schools who accept students with lower GPAs in a tight recruitment market
- This points to a need to focus on factors beyond the traditionally designated “at-risk” student
 - Peers who are excited about their learning experiences positively impact students around them; the converse is also true



When Institutions help students have
a positive, substantive growth
experience in the first year of
college, their success and persistence
are enhanced (Levitz and Noel, 1989)



2006 National Survey of Student Engagement

Defined broadly as how involved students are in academics and campus activities including service and service learning

- *Engagement has compensatory effect on grades and students likelihood of returning for a second year of college- particularly among underserved minority populations*
- *Also held true for students entering college with lower levels of achievement.*



- **And that is multiplied among their peers**

Students who started college who are lower achieving at entrance but who are engaged reap large benefits – the more engaged these students become, the better their grades are and they start catching up to students who started college with a higher level of achievement. One particular study of 18 colleges found that once African American students attained an average level of engagement the odds that they would return for a second year of college at the same institution surpassed those of white counterparts.

Chronicle- 11/17/2006



Student Engagement Through Service-Learning

Service-Learning Defined:

Service-learning brings the community into the learning and teaching process. Concrete learning goals provided by the faculty member, combined with the specific interests and abilities of the service-learner, and needs defined by the community, help to define the appropriate roles for students at community learning sites. The academic, personal, and civic learning are enhanced through guided reflections throughout the experience.



Student Engagement Through Service-Learning

Characteristics of Service-learning

1. Service and reflection are linked to specific course learning goals.
2. Students select roles in line with their interests and aspirations
3. Challenging community involvement moves students beyond their beyond comfort zone....producing growth and a sense of purpose
4. Addresses significant community need
5. Involves strong reflection component to deepen academic understanding, and foster personal growth and development.
6. In-class and out-of-class examination of academic links deepens class learning.
7. Engages faculty more fully in the students' learning experience
6. Additional benefits:
 - Can contribute to confidence, esteem and future orientation.
 - Expands quantity and quality of student involvement in community and on campus.



Service-learning Basic Administrative Requirements

- Agreement from the Academic Dean and department chairs of service-learning model(s) regarding models of engagement.
- Close collaboration with the community to establish and maintain effective partnerships
- Assistance to faculty and students in identifying appropriate learning sites to match learning goals and student ability and interest.
- Administrative oversight and support of service-learner placement, support, monitoring and evaluation.
- Administrative oversight and support of faculty and community relations and communications.
- Assistance with out-of-class reflections and resources to support in-class or student led reflections.



Benefits of Student Leadership Team

- 1. Campuses frequently lack the administrative resources to maintain effective “eyes and ears” at community learning sites.
- 2. Student resources are easier to sustain.
- 3. Students can be recruited and trained to manage on-site the larger placements of service-learners at a single agency.
- 4. Students can also manage multiple, smaller placements sites through effective monitoring from campus
- 5. Students can be very open about issues at the sites with other students, and appreciate the peer attention and support.
- 6. Student leaders thrive with the opportunity to develop and display professional skills and abilities.
- 7. The possibility of gaining a leadership position encourages significant engagement among other students



Service-learning and Retention: Developmental tasks facing students

- Universal challenges include:
 - Develop sense of self, personal identity
 - Clarify academic and career goals
 - Separate from parents
 - Move away from support network at home; establishing new network
 - Clarify personal values, goals
 - Relationship, sexuality decisions
 - Establish sense of competence



Service-learning contributions to developmental tasks

- Significant Service and meaningful reflection contribute to greater self-awareness and stronger personal identity
- Service helps clarify academic and career goals
 - Especially where a broad range of service options and considerable depth of experiences exist
- Students frequently challenge their parents with their service choices and aspirations...establishes independent thinking
- Service, especially in groups, helps students to establish a new support network
- Service helps students clarify personal values, goals, especially when the experiences take them into unfamiliar environments, and the experience is followed by reflection
- Service helps to establish sense of competence, especially when it takes students beyond their comfort zone, & the impact of their service is acknowledged and they receive feedback



Importance of Creating Good Fit; Social and Academic Adjustment

Helen Just, Ph.D. St. Edwards University

Key elements to “good fit” include:

- Educational goals and aspirations
- Commitment to Institution
- Personal attributes (background, skills, abilities)
- Sense of Belonging
 - Feeling an integral part of campus life
 - Membership/participation in diverse set of groups in and off of campus



Service-learning and Retention: Helping students to achieve the right “Fit”

- Active learning in community experience can clarify academic and career goals
- Commitment to College is facilitated by
 - Closer relationships with faculty
 - Experience the college as a valued community asset
 - College mission seen as real and meaningful
- Personal attributes (background, skills, abilities) are defined as strengths when applied through service
- Belonging facilitated by cooperative learning with other service-learners, community partners



Importance of Student Engagement

George D. Kuh, Jillian Kinzie, Ty Cruce, Rick Shoup, Robert M. Gonyea

- The NSSE has 19 items to measure Student Engagement including time spent in co-curricular activities, asking questions in class, working with other students on projects inside or outside of class, discussing ideas from class or readings outside of class. Research linking NSSE and Institutional Practices found:
 1. Engagement has positive, modest effects on grades and persistence for students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, even after controlling for key pre-college variables.
 2. Engagement has compensatory effects on first-year grades and persistence to the second year of college at the same institution for historically underserved students, and especially for lower ability students and students of color compared with White students
- “While student engagement is not a silver bullet, finding ways to get students to take part in the right kinds of activities helps to level the playing field, especially for those from low-income family backgrounds and others who have been historically underserved, increasing the odds that they will complete their program of study and enjoy the intellectual and monetary gains associated with the completion of the baccalaureate degree.”



Service-learning and Student Engagement

- In-class and out-of-class reflections get a broad group students talking about their experience and learning
- Service-learning experiences often lead to discussions of course concepts with friends and peers
- It is common for students to experience their service-learning in groups of other students, and service may involve collaborative projects at the site or in class



Service-learning and Minority Retention

Service-learning outcomes that help

- Minority students may bring skills and strengths to work with diverse groups; can serve as role models; benefit from being perceived as valued
- Community provides role models for minority youth
- Positive impact on personal/ professional development
- Development of interpersonal and problem solving skills
- Increased tolerance of differences and appreciation of diversity
- Increased sense of citizenship and empowerment to address social issues
- Increased self confidence and positive peer interactions



Research of Positive Impact of Service-learning on Retention

from

Robert G. Bringle and Julie A. Hatcher

- Positive outcomes in areas such as
 - informal contact with faculty
 - enhanced peer relationships
 - involvement in active learning pedagogies(Eyler & Giles, 1999; Eyler et al., 2001; Hatcher & Oblander, 1998; Keup, 2005-2006)
- First-year students in a service-learning study skills course reported
 - positive gains in self-confidence
 - improved perceptions of themselves as learners
 - stronger academic skills and competence
 - increased understanding of career and educational goals
 - the ability to develop interpersonal relationships with peers.Hatcher and Oblander (1998)



Research of Positive Impact of Service-learning on Retention (cont)

- Eyler and Giles (1999) document the peer connections that are made through service-learning courses, linking social integration to student retention.
- Students involved in service-learning have increased frequency of interaction with faculty, often in out-of-classroom settings (Sax & Astin, 1997).
- Gallini and Moely (2003) conducted a multi-course evaluation of students' intentions to stay in college and found a relationship between being enrolled in a service-learning course (vs. enrolled only in non-service learning courses) and intention to return.



Research of Positive Impact of service-learning on Retention (cont)

- When campuses consider sequencing service-learning courses using developmental models that reflect the connections among courses (e.g., learning communities) and sequences of courses (e.g., in the major), then more benefits, both economic and educational, may be possible (Jameson, Clayton, & Bringle, 2008)



Service-learning and Retention

Designing Service-learning to Support Retention

Meaghan Mundy and Janet Eyler Vanderbilt University

- Maximize interaction with diverse populations
- Include broad spectrum of campus community in service-learning activity (e.g. with reflection, celebration, project support)
- Facilitate interactions between students and with faculty (e.g. build faculty reflection skills, facilitate joint research opportunities, etc.)
- Build into Freshman Year programming
- Create learning communities (site or issue based, course-based; possibly including community representation)
- Develop placements and activities to match diverse student leaning styles and interests



Service-learning and Retention

Designing service-learning Reflection to support Retention

Meaghan Mundy and Janet Eyster Vanderbilt University

- Develop reflection activities to engage peers in classroom
- Extend Reflection to personal and cognitive development; (include campus experts)
- Link community experience to future goals (include campus career services)
- Explore issues of race and inequality in community and make links to campus experiences (involve off-campus facilitation)
- Involve broad set of campus and community perspectives in reflection activity



Service-learning and Retention

Community College and First Year Experience Program (FYE)

Renee Cornell and Mary Lou Mosley, Paradise Valley Community College

- FYE includes classroom content (campus life; student services, advising and tutoring) with service-learning opportunities outside the classroom.
- Retention from one semester to the next and to the following year is higher for FYE students.
- Within the semester, 90 percent of the FYE students are retained and 89 percent enroll for spring semester.
- Eighty-five percent of fall FYE students enroll in classes the next fall semester, as compared to 43 percent of non-FYE students.



At an ethnically and economically diverse
Southwestern College,

78% of males and 83.6% of females remained enrolled after
taking a service learning English Composition course, as
compared to 65.3% of males and 63.5% of females who took
a non service learning version of the class- Axsom and
Piland, 1999

In a study of African American students who attended
Oberlin College, involvement in community service or
volunteering identified as the factor most strongly correlated
with graduation - Oberlin 1997



“service learning facilitates the intention to re-enroll for a second year of college by its ability to enhance the quality and quantity of faculty interaction” -Keup 2005

“volunteerism and service learning appear to enhance involvement and facilitate integration (both social and academic) during the first year of college, and these, research shows... are critical to student retention”. Vogelsang, Ikdea, Gilmartin, Keup 2002



- The research on the retention value of service-learning is well established
- Changing demographics of the college admission pool only increases the future retention challenge
- Campus service-learning programs are more established and effective
 - In part through support of Campus Compact and other training and resource organizations



But is service and service-learning broadly understood and valued on our campuses as a retention tool?

And if so does, service-learning receive adequate investment to maximize its retention impact?

If not, what can we do?



The SAC Retention Task Force: Five recommendations:

- Formal Exit Interview process with data collection.
- Summer Bridge program
- Develop an early-alert and intervention program for at-risk students (holistic approach that connects student affairs and academic affairs).
- Proactively promote culture of academic success on **campus**. (effective study habits, self-advocacy and skills development, proactive promotion of these programs that increase participation)
- Develop individual targeted retention initiatives for various groups of students.

