Washington State University Center for Civic Engagement
Community Engagement Faculty Fellows Program
Literature Review: Service Learning as a High Impact Practice

PERSISTENCE AND THE ROLE OF FACULTY

It has been known for some time now that students who are engaged in their college experience, academically and socially, are more likely to persist and graduate. (Zhao & Kuh, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini 2005; Astin 1992). Faculty have a critical role to play through pedagogical practices that engage students in and out of the classroom (Tinto 2006). Further, close interaction between faculty and students has been consistently shown to be one of the most important factors in student learning, development, engagement, and satisfaction in college (Astin, 1992; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt, 2006).

HIGH IMPACT PRACTICES

More recently, the concept of 'high impact practice' has emerged as an effective instrument of student engagement, characterized by a commitment of time and effort, real world application, frequent feedback and meaningful student-faculty contact. High impact practices such as undergraduate research, internships, and learning communities have been shown to have a "transformative influence" on the personal development and educational growth of students. Additionally, high impact practices promote learning and success, closing the achievement gap for minority and "underserved" students. (Kuh 2007; Kinzie 2011)

Much of the research around high impact practice has come out of the annual National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), a program in which WSU has participated for many years. Local results have shown that while WSU student participation in some individual high impact practices is consistent with our peer institutions, WSU falls short in providing students with multiple high impact practices, especially in the first year (NSSE-WSU 2014).

SERVICE LEARNING-CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Service learning is recognized as a high impact practice (Kuh 2007) and student civic engagement can be linked directly to student learning and success (Cress 2012). Students are arriving at university today with a keen interest in civic engagement. UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute (2016) reports that freshman interest in civic engagement has reached the highest level since the CIRP Freshman Survey began 50 years ago. Since we know from other research that "motivation matters" in getting and keeping students engaged (Headden & McKay, 2015) why not build on this interest and embed civic engagement in more academic courses at WSU?

As a method of advancing student civic engagement, service learning is defined as a "course-based, credit bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs, and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility" (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995).

In a review of the literature, Simonet (2008) identified four types of engagement inherent in service learning that leads to retention and student success:

- cognitive – using and creating knowledge in the world;
- behavioral – acting to positively impact society
- emotional – establishing connections
- social – belonging; finding community

Service learning creates the conditions for both the academic and social connections believed to be important for student success.

Much of the research points to the interactions inherent in service learning that make it unique, especially with respect to student-faculty interactions. Wolff & Tinney (2006) found that service learning students had more interactions with faculty than non service learning students. Keup (2005) noted that positive learning experiences combined with faculty interaction in service learning impacts student intent to persist. Further, McKay and Estrella (2008) found "strong relationships between quality of interaction with faculty in service learning courses and first-generation students' academic integration, social integration, and beliefs about accomplishing academic goals."

Students engaged in service learning have also been shown to be more socially active and engaged with their peers (Wolff & Tinney 2006). By improving interactions with others, service learning helps to build resiliency in students (Kraft & Wheeler, 2003), an important factor in persistence and success. This vein of service learning research prompts many to support the incorporation of service learning into the freshman year to "quickly establish community connections and a diverse campus" (Mundy & Eyler 2002).

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