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## ABSTRACT

Movements calling for reform in undergraduate education and the initiative for civic responsibility are traced, demonstrating that they have mutual concerns and self-interests. Though largely separate from and unknown to each other, their complementarity provides the basis for joint action. By integrating efforts to increase student involvement in public service with liberal arts curricular reforms which promote active learning and critical thinking, it may be possible to establish a model of undergraduate education that promotes the development of responsible and intelligent citizens. Four sections focus on the following: the context of change in higher education; liberal arts education and public and community service--distinct yet complementary traditions (the liberal arts perspective and the public and community service learning perspective); the opportunity: to integrate the complementary perspectives of liberal arts education and public and community service learning to improve undergraduate education; and faculty are the keys to linking service and the curriculum. Drawing from and combining what has been learned from effective community service, substantive experience-based learning, assessment of liberal learning outcomes, and institutionalization of curricular innovations and teaching improvements, it may be possible to establish a means of effectively integrating public and community service-based learning into the liberal arts curriculum. (SM)

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Liberal Arts, Experiential Learning and Public Service:  
Necessary Ingredients for Socially Responsible  
Undergraduate Education

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## INTRODUCTION

"Education for democratic citizenship involves human capacities relating to judgment, to choice, and, above all, to action. To be literate as a citizen requires more than knowledge and information; it includes the exercise of personal responsibility, active participation, and personal commitment to a set of values. Democratic literacy is a literacy of doing, not simply of knowing. Knowledge is a necessary, but not sufficient condition of democratic responsibility."

With these words Richard Morrill introduces an essay in Liberal Education<sup>1</sup> in which he challenges academicians to take seriously their historical mandate to "educate for democratic values." He suggests that this form of civic education must combine doing with knowing, that it must be both "the empowerment of persons and the cultivation of minds."

This proposition may make common sense to the average citizen. However, in the world of traditional postsecondary education, participation is normally separate from scholarly inquiry, these are radical comments. One must look far afield to find curriculum that requires of students substantive academic inquiry combined with and based upon active participation in socially responsible activity. In the academy, knowledge development lies within the realm of academic departments. Concerns with work, with moral development, with community participation lie with student affairs or residence staff, religious groups, or other non-academic administrators.

Fortunately, as a response in part to growing dissatisfaction with this fragmentation and in part to larger

social movements there is an opportunity to bridge this gap, to integrate students' community participation with critical reflection and analysis. On the one hand there is a strong reform movement within higher education, which questions both the content and the passive, didactic process of postsecondary teaching and learning. On the other hand individuals outside the academy along with non-academic university and college administrators express concern with students' increasingly self-centered attitudes and need for the academy to challenge students to lead more socially responsible lives. In this atmosphere there is potential for establishing an education for democratic citizenship, which Morrill so well defines.

In this paper I trace these complementary movements --- the calls for reform in undergraduate education and the initiative for civic responsibility --- demonstrating that they have mutual concerns and self-interests. Though largely separate from and unknown to each other, their complementarity provides the basis for joint action. By integrating efforts to increase student involvement in public service with liberal arts curricular reforms, which promote active learning and critical thinking, we may establish a model of undergraduate education that promotes the development of responsible and intellegent citizens.

#### THE CONTEXT OF CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The recent period in American higher education has been one of intense self-examination, external criticism, and debate regarding basic goals and purposes. Career minded students have

questioned the relevance and importance of traditional liberal arts education to an increasingly specialized world. Faculty on many campuses have undertaken reviews of curriculum and requirements to determine whether they effectively promote the development of critical thinking and intellectual excellence. A series of national reports has called into question whether curricula meet their defined objectives and suggests a fundamental re-evaluation of the structure and pedagogy of undergraduate education.<sup>2</sup>

Out of this ferment and debate has arisen renewed attention to "excellence" in the teaching/learning process, and a new focus on the importance of active, experience-based learning. The National Institute of Education's Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education (1984) recommended that faculty increase their use of "internships and other forms of carefully monitored experiential learning."<sup>3</sup> A study undertaken for the National Endowment for the Humanities (1984) indicated widespread acceptance and understanding by faculty of internships and field studies as integral parts of liberal arts education.<sup>4</sup> The National Society for Internships and Experiential Education (NSIEE) receives growing numbers of requests for assistance from liberal arts institutions interested in linking classroom instruction to supervised field experience in the community. With greater acceptance and utilization of internships, field studies, and other forms of off-campus learning within higher education, the issue for advocates of experiential education now is not so much whether faculty will

utilize these methods, but rather how to use them, both inside and outside the classroom, and how to effectively assess the learning that results.

During this same period our society has begun to face a variety of complex issues that demand of its citizens greater capacity for critical thinking, civic judgment and flexible involvement than ever before. These issues --- such as peace in the face of growing gaps between rich and poor nations, nuclear proliferation, equal opportunity for and effective integration of minority populations, poverty, and economic instability --- are very complex and deeply ingrained in our social fabric. They are strongly influenced by and interdependent with our relations with the international community. They do not appear to be resolvable by experts alone. To many people they do not appear to be resolvable at all.

If we are to respond effectively to these issues, we need a citizenry with a broad understanding of the interdependencies of peoples, social institutions, and communities and an enhanced ability both to draw upon and further develop this knowledge as they confront and solve human problems. We need people with a strong commitment to act out ethically and thoughtfully what John Gardner calls the democratic compact: "Freedom and obligation,  
liberty and duty, that's the deal."<sup>5</sup>

Yet, in the face of these social problems educators and social researchers report that students are becoming increasingly isolated and their vision narrowed and self-centered. According to the annual ACE-UCLA surveys of freshmen, students since 1972 have attached decreasing importance to helping others, promoting

racial understanding, cleaning up the environment, participation in community action and keeping up with political affairs.

During the same period, the percentage of students placing high priority on being well off financially jumped from 40 to 73 percent. The goal of "developing a meaningful quality of life" showed the greatest decline, almost fifty percent.<sup>6</sup> Surveys by the Carnegie Foundation for The Advancement of Teaching and the Independent Sector<sup>7</sup> show similar trends.<sup>8</sup>

This research suggests that as the problems facing our society increase in severity and complexity, the interest of most college students in these problems and in acting to solve them appears to diminish. This shift in student attitudes may be due in part to students' perception of more limited economic opportunities over the last decade. It may be as well a function of cynicism developed in response to the size, complexity, and seeming insolubility of the problems. Whatever the cause, this sense of student disinterest and disconnection from public concerns and social involvement has stimulated many people to examine the role of the academy in encouraging students to serve community needs --- at the local, national, and international levels --- and in developing citizens with both "civic literacy" and leadership skills infused with civic values.

Frank Newman in Higher Education and the American Resurgence argued that, "if there is a crisis in education in the United States today, it is less that test scores have declined than it is that we have failed to provide the education for citizenship that is still the most significant responsibility of the nation's



schools and colleges." He identified a failure in the structure and content of our educational system. Structurally we have not provided a means of linking classroom study with students' direct experience of social problems and issues. In the area of content, we have failed to effectively educate students with both an understanding of these social problems and issues and an awareness of the traditional responsibilities of democratic citizenship. In response to this situation college presidents, education scholars, politicians, and others have begun to call for integration of the ethic and practice of social involvement, critique and analysis into the mission and values of higher education.

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Thus, along side the national call for renewal and strengthening of undergraduate education there has been successfully rekindled debate on one of the academy's traditional goals --- the development within students of civic literacy, responsibility and participation. In response internships and other forms of active learning are being recognized as effective in promoting students' cognitive skill development and acquisition of knowledge (traditional academic goals), as well as personal and career development (normally considered extra-curricular concerns). Universities and colleges are creating public service centers and other structures which enable students to become involved as volunteers, both to provide community service and to develop in students an awareness of public issues and community needs, leadership skills, and a lifelong commitment to social responsibility.

These are considerable accomplishments, which have resulted in significant movements for change on campuses in a short period of time. However, to date these two movements --- undergraduate education reform and the initiative for social responsibility within higher education --- have run along largely separate tracks with little contact.

The undergraduate education reform movement has been undertaken largely by academic administrators, researchers, and faculty concerned with improving the structure and process of liberal arts education. While recognizing the important values of public service, they often view it as inherently lacking in academic substance and best pursued apart from the curriculum.

The movement for student social responsibility has been led by university presidents, legislators, social critics, and civic educators on the one hand, and student affairs and community service program staff on the other. This movement has concentrated on stimulating and enabling students to become involved in community service, focusing attention on the virtues of giving service and the resulting personal development of students rather than on facilitation of students' academic learning through their service activity.

Although these movements share a common concern with the basic aims of higher education, they have engaged in little sustained, cross-group dialogue. Neither group has seriously considered the explicit relationship between public service and the core, academic mission of higher education institutions. Neither has effectively addressed the place of community service

and what students learn from it within the curriculum.

LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION AND PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY  
SERVICE --- DISTINCT YET COMPLEMENTARY TRADITIONS

Though they work out of distinct traditions, an examination of recent literature from those concerned with improving liberal arts education and those advocating public and community service reveals a common concern with the purpose and pedagogy of undergraduate learning. Though they have worked along separate tracks, these groups articulate similar objectives for students. Could these separate, but complementary perspectives be intergrated? Would such integration serve the goals both of improving liberal arts education and developing committed, involved citizens?

The Liberal Arts Perspective:

Liberal arts educators frequently articulate their purpose as the development of a "habit of mind."

the liberal arts mind seeks freedom through creativity, through reshaping and improving on the past in order to give new meaning to the present. . . There is an emphasis on the fair judging of evidence, on writing and thinking with clarity. There is a concern with discipline and order and also with flexibility, a tolerance for ambiguity. There is an effort to envision alternative solutions to a single problem, to see every particular as part of a network or series of networks, rather than in splendid --- but ultimately false --- isolation. 11

In addition to, and perhaps because of the debate about which content areas should comprise the "common learning" or general education of liberal arts students, these educators have begun to focus on cognitive skill outcomes of a liberal education ---  
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"abilities that last a lifetime." Current research into the

undergraduate experience reinforces this thrust, stressing the importance of these skills and the ability to apply one's learning, as benchmarks for student assessment:

We contend that acquiring or storing knowledge is not enough. Unless one carries knowledge into acts of application, generalization, and experimentation, one's learning is incomplete.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps the most consistent finding that we have discovered is that the amount of knowledge of a content area is generally unrelated to superior performance in an occupation and is often unrelated even to marginally acceptable performance. . . .In particular it is not the acquisition of knowledge that distinguishes the outstanding performer, but rather the cognitive skills that are exercised and developed in the process of knowledge acquisition and use that constitutes our first factor of occupational success. . . . These skills transcend analysis, which consists of the identification of parts, and are closer in spirit to the ability to synthesize information from a prior analysis through a process of induction.<sup>14</sup>

The recent national reports, while reaffirming liberal arts traditions, criticize the passive, impersonal nature of instructional methodologies and call for a pedagogy that is more active and involving, that enables learners to take more responsibility for their education, and that brings them into direct contact with the subjects of their study. Instructional research demonstrates that learning activities which require learners to apply knowledge and skills to the solution of problems more often develop the higher cognitive skills than do traditional classroom methods.<sup>15</sup> The National Institute of Education's Study Group on the Conditions for Excellence in American Higher Education recommended use of internships and other forms of monitored experiential learning, saying that such "active modes of teaching require that students be inquirers --- creators, as well as receivers, of knowledge," and noting that

"students are more apt to learn content if they are engaged with  
it." <sup>16</sup> The learning students obtain from such experiential  
education opportunities is increasingly seen as linking and  
integrating their intellectual growth with their moral, personal,  
and career development.

The Public and Community Service Learning Perspective:

Advocates of student public service and civic education work  
to promote and support students' involvement as volunteers,  
interns, and researchers in the affairs of communities external  
to their campuses. Responding to an awareness that democracy  
requires civic responsibility as well as individual  
entrepreneurship, they seek opportunities for students to develop  
"skills, beliefs, and confidence that will enable them to be  
committed, compassionate citizens." <sup>17</sup>

Some of the goals of public service advocates (providing  
community service, leadership training, etc.) lie outside the  
academic missions of their institutions. Yet, many articulate  
objectives for "service learning programs" --- programs that  
emphasize the accomplishment of tasks which meet human needs with  
conscious educational growth --- that are very similar to ones  
put forth by their liberal arts colleagues. These include:  
"learn how to apply, integrate, and evaluate knowledge or the  
methodology of a discipline," <sup>18</sup> "develop a firsthand understanding  
of the political and social action skills required for active  
citizenship," <sup>19</sup> "develop perspectives and practice analytical  
skills necessary for understanding the social ecology of  
organizations engaged in the delivery of goods and services." <sup>20</sup>

To ensure that service promotes substantive learning,

service learning practitioners seek to connect students' experience to reflection and analysis provided in curriculum. They point to the importance of contact with complex, contemporary social problems and efforts to solve them as an important element of a complete education. They see service learning, when it combines action with critical reflection, conceptualization and abstract experimentation with analyses, as standing very much within the liberal arts tradition.

As Dewey states, this process at least results in a "reconstruction" of experience (as in the formulation of the Newtonian laws of motion or in Einsteins's refomulation), a recodifying of habits (as in overcoming racial bias), and ongoing questioning of old ideas (a habit of learning experientially). Thus experiential learning so pursued transforms the individual, revises and enlarges knowledge, and alters practice. It affects the aesthetic and ethical commitments of individuals and alters their perceptions and their interpretations of the world.<sup>23</sup>

For these people, community service and academic excellence, "are not competitive demands to be balanced through discipline and personal sacrifice [by students], but rather . . . are interdependent dimensions of good intellectual work." They see their challenge as, "devising ways to connect study and service so that the disciplines illuminate and inform experience and experience lends meaning and energy to the disciplines."<sup>24</sup><sup>25</sup>

THE OPPORTUNITY: TO INTEGRATE THE COMPLEMENTARY PERSPECTIVES OF LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION AND PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING TO IMPROVE UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION.

Liberal arts educators appear to be searching for active educational experiences for students, which enable and require them: to reflect critically on the world around them; to link theory to practice and vice versa; to induce, synthesize, and

experiment with new knowledge. Opportunities made available to students through public and community service programs would appear to be a most important means of providing these experiences.

Practitioners of public and community service learning seek opportunities for students to reflect on their service experiences and to relate them to their academic learning. There is growing recognition among these professionals that use of cognitive skills developed in liberal arts education must be stressed in public service in order for their programs to effectively meet the developmental and civic literacy goals they hold for students, and in order for the service provided to have real impact in the community.

The separation of these two movements is unfortunate. For as Richard Morrill points out, civic literacy "requires more than knowledge and information; it includes the exercise of personal responsibility, active participation, and personal commitment to values." <sup>26</sup> Those who are "liberally educated" are those with abilities to make "an action out of knowledge --- using knowledge <sup>27</sup> to think, judge, decide, discover, interact and create."

There is need to bring these movements together to explore how their distinct, yet complementary traditions and their different, yet complementary goals for and positions within the academy can become mutually enhancing in strengthening both students' undergraduate learning and their service to the community. There is need for agreement upon a rationale for integrating public service within the curriculum, and for a



national agenda to ensure that this integration is carried out in a manner that supports the goals of liberal education, and merits the sustained support and involvement of faculty and administrators at liberal arts institutions.

Ironically, because we lack such agreement, in this period when experience-based learning is becoming more accepted within higher education, students' public service activities remain largely separate from the academic curriculum. And the curriculum, stressing individualized activity, isolated from community experiences, issues and values, has become a primary disincentive to students' public service involvement.

This separation of service from learning reflects higher education's traditional distinction between theory and practice and between teaching and research. It inhibits both the effectiveness of students' service efforts and the depth of their learning while they are involved. It leaves the development of citizens who are committed to thoughtful, value-oriented participation in public life to be more of an accidental, secondary outcome of education and service rather than an explicit educational objective.

#### FACULTY ARE THE KEYS TO LINKING SERVICE AND THE CURRICULUM

If there is potential for convergence between these two distinct, but complementary traditions then faculty participation and support of students' public and community service becomes integral to ensuring that these experiences are continually challenging and educational as well as impactful for the community on the receiving end. Faculty, as interpreters of the



university mission, must play a central role in supporting students' interest and activities in public and community service. More importantly, they must assist students in reflecting critically about their public service experiences and in relating them both to broader social issues and to liberal arts disciplines. They must develop an "academics of human reality." Why?

1. To ensure that students serve effectively.

People perform best when they have an opportunity to regularly reflect upon and analyze their experiences, and then practice or try out what they have learned in the next set of experiences. Research into the professions supports this notion, and it is no less true for students. If students are to be of real service to their communities, and if they are to gain knowledge and develop skills as a result, they need opportunities to reflect upon what they are doing. The liberal arts, with its tradition of conscious, reflective analysis, is a logical base from which to sponsor this aspect of service-based learning. Faculty representing liberal arts disciplines have the potential to become service learners' best guides.

2. to ensure that students learn and develop as a result of their public service experiences.

Students continually comment on the benefits they receive from their community service, but often their learning is haphazard, accidental, and superficial. They speak about "how much I learned, or got out of my volunteer experience," but draw a blank when asked to describe how "what they got" relates to their classroom education.

Higher education is founded at least in part on the premise that learning is deepest when it is sponsored and facilitated by instructors. As advocates and sponsors of student community involvement, these institutions have the unique responsibility to both facilitate, assess, and accredit service-based learning and to relate that learning to our common intellectual, social, political and multi-cultural heritage.

3. to reduce the personal and financial disincentives to student participation in public service.

When public service is viewed as an activity to be engaged in if students have extra time, money, self-discipline (or good time management skills), or an ethic of self-sacrifice, --- as an activity that competes for students' attention and energy with the demands of a separate academic life --- it is not something for everyone. Commitment is hard to give and more difficult to keep. The utilization of public and community service-based learning as an effective pedagogical method for student achievement of academic goals makes public service accessible to all students.

4. to place civic education, participation and social responsibility squarely within the academic mission of higher education.

If higher education is to take seriously the role of providing students with the knowledge, skills, beliefs, and confidence necessary for becoming committed compassionate citizens, then contact with complex, contemporary social problems and efforts to solve them, must become an important element of a liberal arts education. Public and community service learning is a means both of connecting outcomes of liberal arts education

to social action and of exploring profound human problems basic to the humanities and sciences as they arise in situations which have immediate meaning to students. Public and community service learning can affect students' aesthetic and ethical commitments. Grappling with real-life applications of theories learned in classrooms is effective education, and can be the basis for students' complete intellectual development.

### CONCLUSION

Much is written about the public roles of postsecondary institutions, about the need for civic literacy among students, and about the need for active modes of learning and curricular reform. There is not much conceptualized or articulated, however, that combines these overlapping movements. These complementary perspectives must be brought together to ensure that the current interest in public service becomes sustained and integrated with that of curricular reform. We must clarify and articulate the ways in which they intersect and what their intersection offers to the drives to improve undergraduate learning and to produce an informed, active citizenry.

The current climate of debate about the aims and pedagogy of undergraduate education has created an opportunity for such dialogue and exchange. Drawing from and combining what has been learned from:

- \* effective community service
- \* substantive experience-based learning (including the need for preparation and instruction in qualitative methods of data gathering, facilitating reflection on the experience and connections between theory and practice, etc.)

- \* assessment of liberal learning outcomes (both in terms of the development of cognitive skills --- e.g., critical thinking --- and in mastery of subject matter content)
- \* institutionalization of curricular innovations and teaching improvements.

we can establish a means of effectively integrating public and community service-based learning into the liberal arts curriculum. We can articulate a coherent set of principles of good practice, and assist faculty and staff in building these methods and structures into existing instructional offerings.

When effectively structured, facilitated, related to discipline-based theories and knowledge, and assessed, public and community service-based learning is the means to linking the initiative to develop social responsibility within students with the efforts to improve undergraduate education. This evolving pedagogy of experience is a key to ensuring the development of graduates who will participate in society actively, ethically and with an informed, critical habit of mind.

## FOOTNOTES

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2. See: Integrity in the College Classroom: A Report to the Academic Community, The Findings and Recommendations of the Project on Redefining the Meaning and Purpose of Baccalaureate Degrees, Association of American Colleges, 1985; Bennett, William J., To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education, National Endowment for the Humanities, 1984; Boyer, Ernest L., College: The Undergraduate Experience In America, Harper & Row for the Carnegie Endowment for the Advancement of Teaching, 1987; Gaff, Jerry L., General Education Today: A Critical Analysis of Controversies, Practices, and Reforms, Jossey-Bass, 1983; Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education, Final Report of the Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education, National Institute of Education, 1984.

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3. National Institute of Education, op. cit., p. 27.
4. Kaston, Carren O. and Heffernan, Preparing Humanists for Work: A National Study of Undergraduate Internships in the Humanities, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, The Washington Center, 1984
5. Gardner, John, "Step One: Putting Innovation Into Action," keynote address to First Annual You Can Make A Difference Conference --- Entrepreneurs in the Public Interest, Stanford University, February 25, 1984.
6. Cooperative Institutional Research Program, The American Freshman: National Norms, Fall 1974 - 1984.
7. Harrison, Charles, Student Service, The Carnegie Foundation for The Advancement of Teaching, Princeton, NJ, 1987.
8. Independent Sector, "Americans Volunteer, 1985," Washington, DC, 1985.
9. Newman, Frank, Higher Education and The American Resurgence, A Carnegie Foundation Special Report, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1985.
10. Responding to leadership from the presidents of Stanford, Brown and Georgetown, more than 125 universities and colleges

joined together in 1985 in a "Campus Compact" to strengthen the academy's role in promoting civic responsibility and to endorse, develop and strengthen a variety of forms of public service by students.

The National Society for Internships and Experiential Education (NSIEE), with support from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, has assisted 185 colleges and universities in developing pedagogical methods and administrative structures for strengthening and institutionalizing programs of active community-based learning within their curricula. Its Special Interest Group on Public and Community Service Learning has swelled to a membership of 139 staff and faculty. Service-curriculum linkages surfaced as a primary topic at NSIEE's 1986 National Conference, and "Public Service, Civic Education, and Action Learning" has been chosen as a major theme for the 1987 conference.

The American Association for Higher Education in 1986 convened an "action community" of faculty and administrators to examine strategies to increase student involvement in community service.

The Council for Liberal Learning of the American Association of Colleges and Universities is exploring the importance of combining academic study with structured community experiences in the development of student insight into the nature of public leadership.

The Kettering Foundation has expanded its series of "Campus Conversations on the Civic Arts," and a network has developed in the Southeast to organize regional faculty seminars and training events.

Responding to a directive from their state legislature the California State University and University of California systems are preparing plans for implementing a "Human Corps" concept, which may require all students to engage in community service.

Finally, despite the predominate mood on most campuses, new student leadership has emerged through organizations such as the Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL).

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25. Eskow, Seymour, "A Pedagogy of Experience," in Synergist, fall, 1979.
26. Morrill, R. L.. op. cit. p. 365.
27. Loacker, et al, op. cit.
28. Bruce Payne, Director of the Duke University Leadership Program, used these terms to describe service-based learning at the "COOL Summit Meeting," Durham, North Carolina, August, 1987.
29. The needed principles for practice include: effective preparation for, facilitation and assessment of service-based learning; institutionalization; working sensitively and effectively with community organization partners in such



programs. See Stanton, T. and Howard C., "Principles of Good Practice for Service Learning in Postsecondary Education," in Synergist, Winter, 1981, Vol. 9. No. 3.