



## Review: *Scholarship for Sustaining Service Learning and Civic Engagement*

Melody Bowdon, Shelly Billig, and Barbara Holland (Eds.).  
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Sustaining community-based partnerships is essential to promoting the scholarship of engagement along the K-20 continuum. That's the basic premise for the eighth edition in the *Advances in Service-Learning Research* series edited by Melody Bowden, Shelley Billig, and Barbara Holland. This latest volume includes peer-reviewed articles competitively selected from presentations given at 7th International Research Conference on Service-Learning and Community Engagement held in Tampa, Florida during October 2007.

Like other volumes in the series, this book presents new research, discusses promising theory, proposes methods for research, and generates ideas that could advance service-learning. But, in this particular volume, readers will also find information coming from the perspectives of community members, students, faculty, administrators and discipline-based organizations.

The first section of the book highlights two investigations of service learning in interdisciplinary university programs. The initial chapter presents preliminary results from a multiyear study of student learning within and across a sequence of service-learning courses. This long-term project is focused on assessing written student reflections to determine the levels of learning related to Bloom's (1956) Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. Authors present evidence that the intentional design of service instruction can lead students toward higher levels of thinking and more sophisticated understanding of course material. Detailed charts present data regarding different levels of learning by course. An appendix provides sample reflection prompts and a rubric to help student leaders align the mission, methods, and resources for a nonprofit organization. The second chapter's author uses Chickering's (1969)

psychosocial student development theory and a pre-/post-test design to study the impact of service-learning on 119 first-year undergraduate honors students. Results show that participation in the mandatory 15 hours of service learning impacted the honors students' sense of making a significant contribution to the community. Student gender, previously completed non-required service hours, and religious activities were found to relate to the efficacy findings. This study author points out that first year college experiences could show honors students that they have a role to play in making changes in their communities.

The book's second section shifts topic to consider service learning in K-12 educational programs. In chapter three, the authors present a 3 year quasi-experimental study of character development in middle and high school students across a large school district. The authors cite Berkowitz and Bier's (2005) notion that character education helps young people develop capacities to be socially and personally responsible, moral, ethical, and self-managed. Charts and a graph detail the results. Case studies of programs with the highest student gains on various types of character development offer useful ideas for best practices in implementing future character development projects. In chapter four, the author compares Billig's (2001) model of service-learning to her own findings about K-12 teachers' beliefs about sustainability. Connections between the two approaches are noted for eight sustainability factors: a) strong leadership, b) cultural norms, c) organizational expectations, d) incentives, e) visibility, f) availability of funding, g) producing measurable impacts, and supportive policies on national, state or local levels. In addition, values that help teachers sustain their own service-learning efforts are noted: a) connections between people and areas of the curriculum, b) service learning's fit with their teaching philosophies and styles, and c) their sense of making the world a better place. Suggestions are offered by the author for administrators and other school leaders to address each of these sustainability factors.

In the third book section, faculty and student professional development are covered. Chapter five characterizes research on service-learning as a feedback loop for faculty development and for institutional change. The authors sought evidence which might support the institutionalization of service-learning pedagogy at their university by surveying 670 students over three semesters. They also used teaching circles to develop service learning goals across courses and conducted a mini survey to identify problems by community partners. As a result, the team identified promising practices for future university wide efforts which might provide useful to other programs. This chapter also includes the full survey developed by the authors as an appendix. Chapter six draws on the often-ignored perspective of professional organizations in helping to assess student's learning through service-learning projects. The chapter authors explain how they developed criteria for beginning practitioners in public relations based upon recommendations by a professional organization, and subsequently used this framework to study the quality of students' work. The chapter offers charts and an appendix listing valuable knowledge, traits and skills needed by beginning public relations professionals. The chapter also highlights a process for student assessment, which might be adapted to other disciplines.

The final section of the book zeros in on service learning and the development of ethics and ethical decision-making. The first study surveyed college students in a service learning course as well as other students who did not participate in service learning. Both community members and business partners responded to the survey as well. Results indicated service-learning positively impact students' sense of ethics and showed differences in the kinds of reasoning used by the community and business partners. The final chapter in the book investigated whether service-learning impacted ethical decision-making abilities in more than 800 students at 21 universities. The author found that service learning does influence decision-making but results are statistically higher when students complete intense and engaged service experiences. Detailed charts and suggestions for future related research are offered in the latter article. Both studies have implications for best practices for ethics-related learning following Rest and colleagues' work (1986, 1994) on moral development.

While the content in this volume represents cutting-edge research and thinking, the writing style and scholarly jargon used in most of the book would not make contents readily accessible for community partners or K-12 teachers. Three notable exceptions are the chapter on developing standardized methods of student assessment via recommendations of professional organizations and the two chapters specific to service learning in secondary schools. Continuing dialogue between different campus-community partners helps foster the relationships, which contribute to overall sustainability; so working to eliminate jargon and contextualize content for different readers would be definitive steps toward sharing important information across different audiences of readers.

Despite the technical language and sometimes difficult to understand research projects, the book's benefits far outweigh its limitations. Innovative ideas, strong research studies with notable results and well-supported insights for future planning can all be found between the two book covers. The appendixes alone make the volume valuable. For those with a long-standing commitment to service-learning and engagement, these elements would make this book an important addition to the bookshelf, well worth the purchase price.

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