Intersections of Service-Learning and Social Justice

Through the Eye of the Needle: The Commitment to Justice in Jesuit Higher Education (2017)

Seattle University

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Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach

- Solidarity is learned through "contact" rather than through "concepts"

- Students, in the course of their formation, must let the gritty reality of this world into their lives, so they can learn to feel it, think about it critically, respond to its suffering and engage it constructively

What is Service-Learning?

- "A credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of the course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility" (Bringle and Hatcher, 1996, p. 222).

The PULSE Program for Service Learning at Boston College

Meghan Sweeney, Boston College

ENTERING

EST. 1969

PULSE

Overview

- What is PULSE?

- Program Curricular Structure

- Learning in PULSE

What is PULSE?

- All Boston College undergraduates must take:
  - One year of philosophy
  - One year of theology
- The PULSE Program for Service Learning core course, "Person and Social Responsibility," is *one* of several ways that students can satisfy these requirements

Curricular Structure

THREE COMPONENTS

1) Classroom Lecture

2) Discussion Hour

3) Weekly Service

Curricular structured (cntd.)

1) The Classroom Lecture (26 students)

- Students are asking and exploring *basic philosophical and theological questions*

- *Readings and assignments* are often consistent with core courses in philosophy and theology but with attention to issues of social justice

- Some assignments focus on *integrating* classroom and service placement

Text examples from Fall semester

- Rachel Remen, "In the Service of Life"
- Jane Addams, "The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements"
- Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have a Dream" and "The Most Durable Power"
- Seamus Heaney, *Burial at Thebes (Antigone)*
- Plato, *Republic*
- Aristotle, parts of *Metaphysics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*
- David Shipler, *The Working Poor*
- Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility*
- Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground*
- Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*
- *The Bible*

Assignment examples

- Weekly Questions
- Weekly Sentences
- Creative Writing Assignment
- Exams: Midterm and Final
- Papers
- Journals
- Process Notes
- Art Project
- Co-Curricular
- Discussion Preparation and Facilitation
- Class Participation
- Institutional and Social Analysis Project

Curricular structure (cntd.)

2) The Discussion Hour (13 students)

- Focused critical reflection on the intersection and integration of classroom and service

- Opportunity for students to tell stories, share experiences, ask for help, and learn from their classroom peers

- Relationship building, trust building

Curricular structure (cntd.)

3) Weekly Service

- Approximately 8 hours per week onsite (plus ~4 hours for travel)

- 75% *direct service* with individuals served by the community partner agency

Learning Goals for the PULSE Core

PULSE Core Goals

- Students completing the PULSE core will be able to:

1) Have an understanding of the ways in which service and the study of philosophical and theological traditions inform each other;

Learning goals for the PULSE core (cntd.)

PULSE Core Goals

- Students completing the PULSE core will be able to:

2) Demonstrate the ability to employ an ongoing praxis methodology in which they *encounter* challenging social realities, critically *reflect* upon them in conversation with philosophical and theological traditions, and *act* with informed and critical agency;

Learning goals for the PULSE core (cntd.)

PULSE Core Goals

- Students completing the PULSE core will be able to:

3) Develop a critical understanding of intersectionality and interlocking structures of privilege and oppression, especially race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability;

Learning goals for the PULSE core (cntd.)

PULSE Core Goals

- Students completing the PULSE core will be able to:

4) Demonstrate moral development through a growth in compassion, a sense of responsibility and agency in response to injustice to contribute to the common good and social justice, and engagement in questions about the divine-human relationship.

Learning in the PULSE Program

- **Jesuit Educational Goal:** *Cura Personalis*
  - To educate the *entire person*
  - Educating *persons*, not just communicating content

- **Learning in PULSE tries to be about:**
  - Academic excellence and understanding
  - Formation of students who will become women and men *for* and *with* others

- **Learning in PULSE happens for students:**
  - Intellectually
  - Morally
  - Spiritually

Student end-of-year survey quote

'…my PULSE experience has enabled me to [want to] ensure that everyone has access to justice in multiple settings and contexts. Developing a greater sense of social responsibility, in these roles, I will continue this commitment to others, and strengthen my community, following my graduation from Boston College.' (Female, St. Stephen's After School Program)

# Questions and comments about PULSE?

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Social Justice and Spiritual Growth

Michelle Sterk Barrett, College of the Holy Cross

	PULSE Pre Mean	PULSE Post Mean	CSBV Pre Mean	CSBV Post Mean	PULSE *d*	HERI *d*
On a spiritual quest	1.87	2.1	1.8	1.5	.33	-.66
My spiritual/religious beliefs provide me with strength, support, and guidance.	2.84	3.04	2.9	2.8	.21	-.10
Having discussions with my friends about the meaning of life.	2.17	2.35	1.9	1.9	.29	.00
Feeling unsettled about spiritual and religious matters	1.89	2.09	1.8	1.8	.30	.00
Struggled to understand evil, suffering, and death	1.99	2.31	1.8	1.8	.52	.00

How might spiritual growth be occurring?
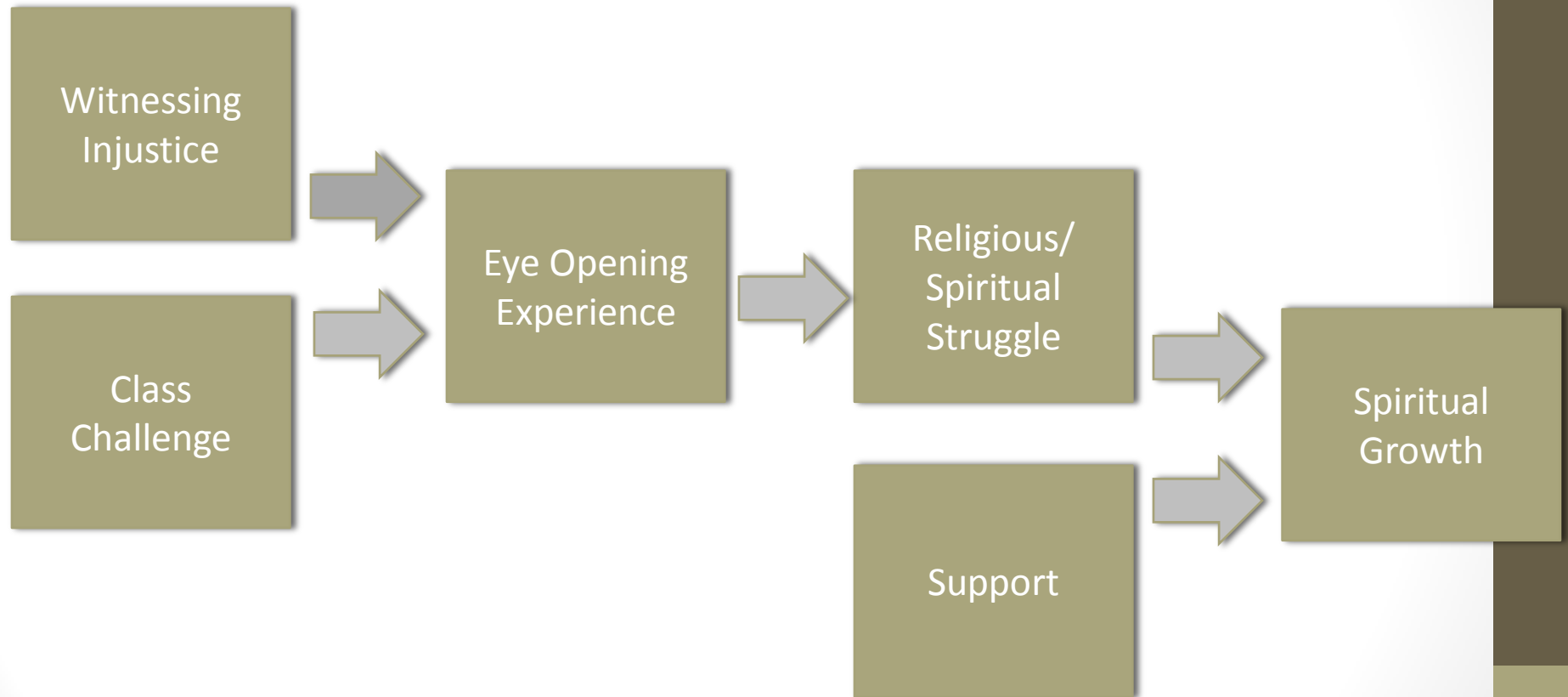
"There was a woman I was talking to last night whose son had just been shot and killed and she was incredibly upset about that. It was hard to hear her talking about how she didn't really have time to grieve because she was worried about paying bills and other things because she has so many things that she has to take care of. She was actually employed, but it was a job that didn't really pay enough for you to grow or sustain yourself very easily. Hearing her talk about the pain in that whole situation was very hard. Listening to her talk about it was one of those things where I didn't even know what to say to console her. What do you say to someone who just lost their child? Especially someone who is still so stressed about staying alive and sheltered that they can't even properly focus on their pain."

Holy Cross Data

- CBL impacted my faith/spiritual development. (45.0% agreement overall)

  - 50.2% (placement) vs. 24.6% (project)

  - 19.4% (<5 hours), 41.9% (6-10), 50.8% (>10 hours)

  - 55.6% (social justice focus of class) vs. 34.7% (non-social justice focus of class)

¿Aprendizaje en la comunidad? ¿Justicia social? Service-Learning in Spanish-language Courses

Bridget Franco, College of the Holy Cross

"I know that we made a difference when we went to [these schools] in Worcester. But, in reality, the problem is much bigger than we thought. Service-learning for 1-2 hours a week doesn't do much to improve the root causes of these problems. School reform cannot change the issue by itself. First, we need to improve the challenges in the social and economic scenes in the city. [...] For example, working wages for adults who work many hours without fair pay should be increased. [...] We also need to improve children's health, because if a child is sick, s/he can't attend school."

"El proyecto de CBL me ayudó a abrir los ojos para querer traer cambio al sistema educativo. Mi meta será eliminar el 'Latino Gap.' También me impulsó a pensar en lo que quiero hacer con mi futuro profesional y de una u otra manera quiero participar en la política."

Curricular Context (2011-2016)

Spanish Department Courses

- Filmmaking in Spanish

- Spanish Composition & Conversation

- Introduction to Textual Analysis

- Aspects of Spanish-American Culture
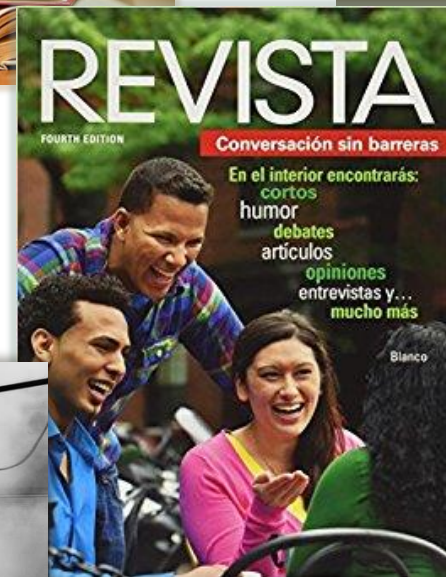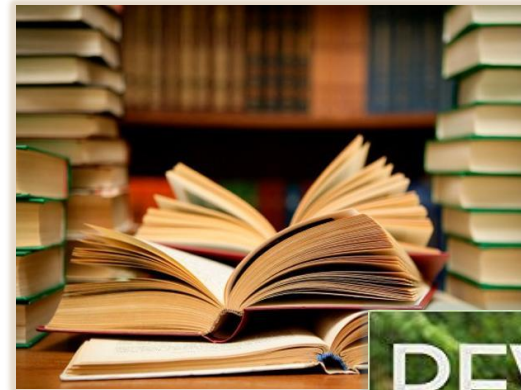
Primary Learning Objectives

- Improve students' writing, reading and speaking skills in Spanish

- Identify and analyze the main themes and techniques of literary texts from a variety of genres, including poetry, narrative, and drama

- Learn and master the language and terminology of cinematography in Spanish through active immersion in film productions and firsthand experience with digital movie editing

- Introduce students to the rich cultural diversity in the Spanish American world and its social, historical and political contexts

Service-Learning as Effective Pedagogy

My SPAN classes from 2011-2016, (n=99)	AGREEMENT	MEAN (scale 1-4)
I learn better when I apply classroom material to real experience.	98%	3.59
Including CBL in this course enabled me to learn more deeply than I otherwise would have.	94%	3.26
It was valuable to include CBL in this course.	92%	3.47
CBL was valuable for my intellectual growth.	89%	3.25

*Assessment data provided by the Donelan Office of Community-Based Learning, College of the Holy Cross

Secondary, Implicit and/or Optional Objectives

- Reflect critically on different approaches to and experiences of themes (such as social justice, life and death, immigration, human rights), particularly within Spanish-speaking communities across the world

- Find meaningful connections between students' academic work and the local Latino/Latin American community

- Experience the ways in which different literary genres connect with the real world through creative writing projects and/or an experiential learning project (CBL) in the local community

Student Responses to Social Justice Issues

My SPAN classes from 2011-2016 (n=99)	AGREEMENT	MEAN (scale 1-4)
Through CBL I gained greater appreciation for cultural diversity.	96%	3.58
This course increased my interest in community service engagement.	91%	3.45
Through CBL I gained a deeper understanding of problems facing society.	85%	3.36
CBL enabled me to better understand the mission of Jesuit Higher Education.	77%	2.97

*Assessment data follows similar trends during same time period for all Spanish-language classes with a SL component

Strategies

- Link course objectives to service-learning experiences, social justice issues, and the Jesuit Higher Ed Mission

- Be selective about placement sites

- Create space for an introduction to SL, biweekly check-ins, reflection sessions, and SL-related written assignments

- Integrate the SL component in grade

- Project vs. Placement

¿Aprendizaje en la comunidad?

Issues when teaching in languages other than English:

- Lack of resources in target language about the theoretical aspects of SL

- Few academic publications, textbooks, conference papers about SL in courses on literature, cinema, and filmmaking

- Linguistic levels may slow or interfere with the reflection process

Empowering Racially Minoritized Students through CBL

Michelle Sterk Barrett and Isabelle Jenkins, College of the Holy Cross

Quantitative Results

- Four relevant assessment questions. Level of agreement with the following:
  - *I Learn Better When I Apply Class Material to Real Experience.*
  - *Including CBL in This Course Enabled Me to Learn More Deeply than I Otherwise Would Have.*
  - *It Was Valuable to Include CBL in This Course.*
  - *I Could Have Benefitted from Additional Opportunities to Discuss My CBL Experience in Class*

Variable	White/ Caucasian N	White/ Caucasian Mean	Racially Minoritized N	Racially Minortized Mean	*P*
Applying Concepts to Experience	1168	3.49	350	3.59	.005
CBL Led to Deeper Learning	1170	3.31	352	3.41	.015
Valuable to Include CBL	1170	3.33	352	3.38	.346
Additional CBL Class Discussion	1167	2.44	350	2.70	.000

Qualitative Results

- CBL as among the most valuable learning experiences. Why?
  - Parallels between learning preferences and CBL
  - Characteristics and actions of professors
  - Social responsibility and a desire to give back
  - Ability to relate
  - Empowerment

- Counter-narrative to a deficit-ideology

Parallels between Leaning Preferences and CBL

Learning Preferences

- Applying Course Concepts to Real-Life Experience (11)
- "Hands On" Learning (9)
- Class Discussions (11)
- Hearing a Diversity of Perspectives in Class Discussions (9)
- Strong Relationships/Connecting with Professors (10)
- Strong Relationships/Connecting with Peers in Class (7)

Value CBL Added to Classes

- Connections between Theory & Experience (13)
- Stimulated Class Discussions (12)
- Learning that Really Mattered (12)
- Stronger Relationships in the Classroom (11)

Characteristics and Actions of Professors

- A comfortable and non-judgmental class atmosphere (12)
- Ability to learn is intertwined with whether they feel they have a relationship or connection with their professor (10)
- The classes where "I learned effectively were the ones that I felt like my professors knew who I was." The classes that this student "didn't really care about" were "the ones where I didn't have a strong relationship with my professor."
- "I just feel like the professor plays a big role because I have to feel comfortable with the professor personally in order to learn effectively."

Insecurity and Pressure

- "[The CBL professor] was definitely very encouraging of having us have dialogue in the classroom. And I think that really makes a difference for a lot of students. Especially for my friends who are students of color. Being able to have the professor encourage you to speak in class is-it changes everything because...we grew up we attended schools where our opinions were not very valued and there was definitely a racial element, but also a gendered element of why we weren't taken seriously. It's very, very intimidating being here with so many students who are so intelligent and then going into the classroom and feeling like OK, now I have to compare myself to these students or I have to compete with these students and what am I going to be able to contribute?"

Social Responsibility and a Desire to Give Back

- One student explained how much financial support Holy Cross has provided him and how he and other students may want to give back because of being "grateful for the opportunities that one has been given" through financial aid.

- "**My Latina friends, we're so excited to graduate because this is probably the biggest deal to our families and to ourselves and it's because at the end of the day, we didn't do this just for us we did it for our community** and to be an example and to say I've heard the same things you've heard. I've heard the same racial slurs. I've heard the same nos. I've heard everything that makes you feel worthless. But, look at it, I'm crawling to the finish line, but I'm there. I'm going to make it to a place where I can silence those nos for other girls, silence those racial slurs for other girls, and make them feel like they are capable of doing anything."

Ability to Relate

- Ability to relate mentioned by 11 of 13 interviewees

- Nearly 70% of interviewees discussed how they could see themselves or a family member in those they were working with at their CBL sites.

- "I think maybe…like for the minorities here, I think we can relate more, we kind of see like, 'oh that's me,' or like 'that's who I could have been.' And so, I think that's why. Because I feel like maybe the White students who attend CBL, they do it and they feel good about the service, but maybe they don't fully understand where the people are coming from. I can 100% understand the boy that I was tutoring because in 6th, 7th grade, that was me, I was like, can I really make it to a private high school, like do I have the ability to do that?"

Worcester Feels Like Home

- "Worcester reminds me in many ways of [my home]. It's very urban, a lot of Latinos, African-Americans. So when I step out into Worcester…when I'm there, I'm walking around, I feel comfortable, it reminds me of [home]…. As soon as I enter the gates I become a minority. It's kind of weird to think about. Because right over the gates, I become a minority."

Empowerment

- Confidence in the Classroom
- Desired, Difficult Dialogue
- Empowerment through Service
- Empowerment through Self-Discovery

Implications

- Numerous scholars contend cultural differences in learning preferences are not adequately reflected in American educational systems (Darder, 1991; Goodman, 2011; hooks, 1994; Ibarra, 2001; Rendón, 2009).

- Persistence of racially minoritized students intertwined with level of dissonance between precollege culture and college culture (Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus & Quaye, 2009)

- Relationship between service-learning and retention. (Bringle, Hatcher, & Muthiah, 2010; Cress, Burack, Giles, Elkins, & Carnes Stevens, 2010; Gallini & Moely, 2003; Keup, 2005; Lockeman & Pelco, 2013; Mungo, 2015; Reed, Rosenberg, Statham, & Rosing, 2015; York, 2013).

- Asset-Based Approach to Education

Potential for Marginalization

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- Access to high-impact practices

# Privilege, Power, and Solidarity in Service-Learning

Daniel Justin, Regis University

Jesuit Volunteer Corps

Problematizing Service-Learning

- Relationship Designed and Controlled by the Institution

- Students Choose the Placement

- Burden of Training

- Freedom to Fail

- Habituate Serial Relationships

- Experience of Power vs. Need

- Critical Awareness => Critique of Partner

- Personal Transformation of Students vs. Institutional Relationship

ACADEMIC MATERIAL

Service Learning
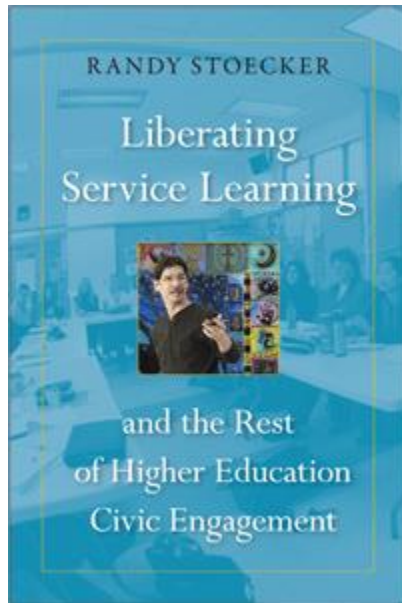
RELEVANT SERVICE

REFLECTION
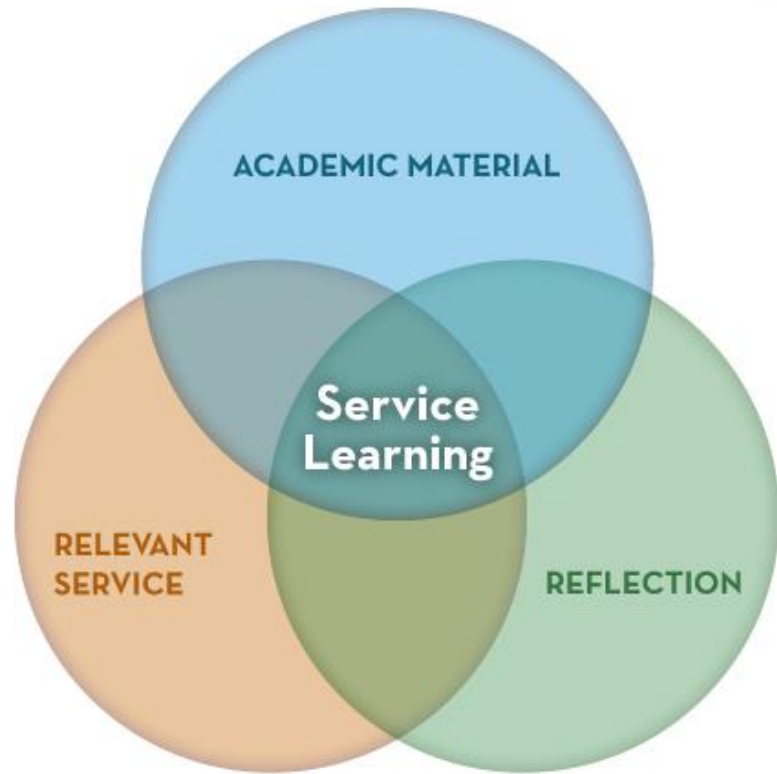
Problematizing Service-Learning

Is Justice the Best We Can Do?
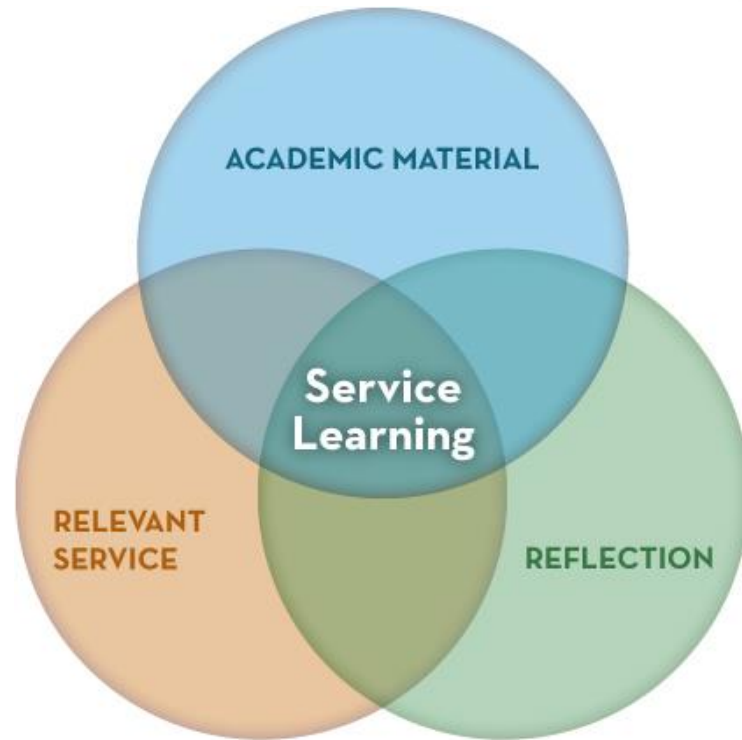
Randy Stoecker

Liberating Service Learning
and the Rest of Higher Education Civic Engagement

What Do We Mean By:

- Service
- Learning
- Change
- Community

The Virtue of Solidarity

Sollicitudo Rei Socialis

'This then is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far.

On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.

- SRS, no. 38

The Virtue of Solidarity
Sollicitudo Rei Socialis

Civic Friendship (Concord)

1. Root: Interdependence as Moral Fact
2. Good of Working Together
3. Full Dignity of the Other
4. Preferential Option for the Poor
5. Demands Participation from All
6. Virtue of Persons, Communities, and Nations

Solidarity

'If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time.

But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.'

- Lilla Watson

Practicing Solidarity in Service-Learning

- Collaboration toward Mutual Goal

- Each Brings Own Gifts and Resources

- Knowledge Created Together

- Participatory/Action Research

Theologizing about Poverty
Vs.
Doing Theology with the Poor

Discussion Questions

1. Do you see Fr. Kolvenbach's vision being implemented effectively on your campus through SL?

2. Who has access to service-learning courses on your campus and how is this related to students' ability to afford spending time doing unpaid service? Who on your campus is attracted to taking service-learning courses? What is the perception on your campus of service-learning courses, who they're for, and who takes them?

3. Bridget shared that at Holy Cross, upper-level courses in the Spanish Department and Latin American & Latino Studies program have a high % of racially minoritized students. Keeping in mind the research suggesting that "racially minoritized students may respond more favorably to service-learning", how does this impact the SL experience in these courses? Relatedly, are there SL courses at your institution that have a high percentage of racially minoritized students? If yes, how might this impact the SL experiences in those courses?

4. What justice issues are inherent in prioritizing traditional methods of teaching and learning over experiential education—especially if racially minoritized students may respond more favorably to service-learning?

Discussion Questions (cntd.)

1. In what ways can service-learning perpetuate the marginalization of racially minoritized students on predominantly white campuses? How can a faculty member prevent service-learning reflection discussions from normalizing the experiences of students from privileged backgrounds?

2. SL can be utilized as an effective teaching method even when courses are not specifically focused on questions of social justice. How can a faculty member teaching such a course ensure that course content is covered while also ensuring that students have the support they need to process challenging experiences?

3. The power differential between higher education institutions and poorly resourced community partners can lead the needs of the college/university to be prioritized over the needs of community-based organizations. How can community partners (and the individuals within them) be treated as equals in this inherently imbalanced relationship?

4. What other kinds of support can be provided to students who experience challenging SL experiences in courses that are not specifically focused on social justice?

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