



the TUTOR



Vol. 8 No. 1

Graduate School University of Colorado at Boulder

1995

Service-Learning at CU

Transforming Learning into Something Relevant

Robin Crews

"... The mission of the University is to provide high quality teaching, research, and service programs in an integrated manner..." (*Mission and Goals of the University of Colorado*).

"... CU-Boulder plans to move into the top level of [the Association of American Universities]. Such a position implies that the campus will have a national and international reputation for excellence in teaching, research, and service..." (*University of Colorado at Boulder Strategic Plan*).

Away from noisy political rhetoric about the role of the university, debates about effective teaching, calls for relevant curricula, and editorials about the university's need to strengthen its ties with the local and state community, there is a quiet transformation underway at CU-Boulder. What lies behind this unheralded change is at the very heart of the university's mission, goals, and strategic plan, yet is something the public is often unaware of—the value the university community places on academic and public service. Service has often taken faculty into the community, now faculty are bringing *service-learning* into the classroom.

Although most of the campus may not know it, the University of Colorado at Boulder is a national leader in the service-learning movement. In March 1995 in Washington, DC, Cathy Comstock, Acting Director of the Farrand Hall Academic Program, became the first national recipient of the Thomas Ehrlich Faculty Service-Learning Award, presented by the American Association for Higher Education. Concurrently, Ted Adams, a senior majoring in political science and a member of CU's INVST Program, was one of five students to win the 1995

Howard R. Swearer Student Humanitarian Award.

Also adding to CU's national visibility is the fact that it is the home of service-learning on the Internet: the Service-Learning Discussion Group and Archives, begun over two years ago, continue to provide the national service-learning community with essential venues to meet fundamental communication and information-sharing needs. At present, the group has about 570 subscribers who carry on wide-ranging discussions about pedagogy, curriculum development, ethics, community development, program development, and the politics of service-learning in the 1990s. Whether the conversations focus on nuts-and-bolts techniques or abstract theorizing and analysis, they underscore the fact that service-learning is a growth pedagogy with applications in primary, secondary, and postsecondary education.



Cathy Comstock
Chair, Service-Learning Faculty Council
Recipient of the 1995
Thomas Ehrlich Faculty Service-Learning Award

What is Service-Learning?

Definitions of service-learning vary considerably among those who embrace it. At its core, service-learning is a form of experiential learning that employs service as its modus operandi. Service-learning pedagogies are used by teachers in colleges, universities, and kindergarten through high school (K-12) to enhance traditional modes of learning, to engage students actively in their own education through experiential learning in course-relevant contexts, and to foster lifelong connections between students, their communities, and the world outside the classroom.

At their best, service-learning experiences are reciprocally beneficial to both the community and the students. For many

continued on page 2

community organizations, students augment service delivery, meet crucial human needs, and provide a basis for future citizen support. For students, community service is an opportunity to enrich, personalize, and apply classroom knowledge; explore careers and majors; pursue civic and cultural literacy; develop occupational skills; enhance personal growth and self-image; establish job links; and foster a concern for social problems. Students thus develop a sense of social responsibility and commitment to public and human service.

Service-Learning at CU Boulder

Some CU-Boulder faculty have been involved in service-learning for 30 years or so; others are just getting their feet wet. Similarly, student organizations, such as the Volunteer Clearing House have been providing students with volunteer and service opportunities for close to three decades. In 1992, with the assistance of the Chancellor's Office, a number of faculty and service-learning program representatives formed the CU-Boulder Service-Learning Steering Committee to better coordinate their efforts and learn from one another.

In 1993, the Steering Committee created the CU Service-Learning Center to serve as the central coordinating and communicating locus for all service-learning activities on campus. The Center joined the existing Student Employment Center to become the Student Employment and Service-Learning Center. The center is administered by the Office of Financial Aid and located in the UMC, Room 165.

Now, in addition to our Service-Learning Center, nine campus programs offer students the opportunity to be involved in service or service-learning: the Cooperative Education and Internship Program, the Farrand Hall Outreach Program, the International and National Volunteer Service Training Program (INVST), the Lend Law Student Program, the Social Action Internship and Learning Center Project, the Volunteer Clearing House, the Volunteer Management Program, the Greek Council, and the Wardenburg Volunteer Services Program.

Service-learning is also part of the curriculum at CU-Boulder. At present, faculty and graduate instructors teach about 37 service-learning courses in programs or departments—the Farrand Academic Program, communications, Continuing Education, INVST, economics, education, geography, honors, humanities, Peace and Conflict Studies, political science, the President's Leadership Class, psychology, sociology, Spanish, and the Women Studies Department, for example.

Service-Learning and Graduate Instructors

In January 1995, the Graduate Teacher Program hosted a two-day conference on service-learning entitled: "Academic Dis-course and Community Projects: Engaging Students in Service-Learning" to introduce service-learning to over 80 graduate instructors. Participants had the opportunity to explore service-learning at many levels: from the abstract to the concrete; from the various perspectives of the teacher, students, the community agencies, and the "partners in service."

There is every reason to believe that graduate instructors will be instrumental in integrating service-learning into the curricu-



Tooter's Teaching Tips

If you would like to motivate students:

1. Stop professing and start doing.
2. Relate theory to life and action.
3. Give students ownership in their learning process.

lum at CU-Boulder and at colleges and universities around the country. Graduate students who teach often are willing and ready to explore new ways of teaching.

What Are the Benefits of Service-Learning?

Faculty often find it difficult to engage students in the learning process and in the subject matter. This is particularly true with today's students, many of whom seem to have acquired more information from high velocity, dynamic media—television, computers, video games—than from static ones—books and periodicals in the library.

The task of engaging students is even more daunting under the follow-

ing conditions: (1) when students perceive that they have no ownership in the learning process; (2) when learning is undertaken in the isolated and sometimes boring environment of the classroom; (3) when learning means listening to a professor "profess" for an hour or more at a time; and (4) when most learning is expected to be conducted through the intake of static words on a page.

Conversely, teachers who employ service-learning techniques are discovering that students come alive when: (1) they are given the opportunity to become active participants in their own learning; (2) the subject matter has a human face; (3) the learning connects theory and ideas with daily life and action; (4) the content is not entirely predetermined before students arrive in class at the beginning of the semester; (5) what is learned has relevance for students now and in the future; and (6) students realize that they are making a difference in the lives of others while pursuing their own education.

Thus, the central pedagogical question for the teacher becomes: *How do I best teach my subject matter in collaborative, active ways that involve and engage students personally and make them responsible for their own learning?* Here, the notion that "we learn best by doing" should offer us a clue about the nature of the answer.

How To Prepare a Service-Learning Course: First Steps

Whether novice or expert in service-learning, you first will want to determine the relevance of the service component to the goals of your course and decide whether service will be an optional or mandatory component of the course. If service is optional, it will be necessary to determine course requirements for those students who choose the service-learning option and those who do not. Each approach has benefits and drawbacks. If this is your first service-learning course and you want to make the service-learning component mandatory, it would be prudent to procure the approval of your department chair first.

Second, it is important to determine the amount of time students will be expected to spend completing the service

The Tutor is published by the Graduate Teacher Program, a division of the Graduate School. For further information, please contact:
The Graduate Teacher Program, Norlin S461, University of Colorado at Boulder, Boulder, CO 80309-0362.

PH: (303) 492-4902; FAX: (303) 492-4904
Email: gtp@spot.colorado.edu

Laura L. B. Border, Editor; Trang Bui, Typographer

component of their course work and the percentage of the final grade that the service component comprises.

Third, you will want to establish contact with a service agency that has demonstrated a need for volunteers. In order for the service element to be pertinent to the overall learning experience of the student, the agency's purpose must have direct relevance to the class. The Service-Learning Center can assist faculty in establishing contacts with agencies that have demonstrated a need.

Fourth, explore and identify the evaluation techniques to be used to determine the service portion of the grade. Finally, you will need to develop a concise definition of learning objectives, course requirements, evaluation methods, and benefits that can be integrated into a course syllabus. In planning your course, be sure to allow enough time each week for students to engage in structured reflection about their service and its relationship to course readings, lectures, and class discussions. Also allow time early in the course for problem-solving around unsuccessful, initial placements.

At the Beginning of the Semester

In addition to your normal overview of the course, you will want to be sure to accomplish the following during the first-class period: (1) introduce service-learning to the students; (2) explain the service component(s) of the course; (3) discuss steps for securing suitable placement, timetables and deadlines for finding and beginning service; and (4) explain the evaluation methods employed in the course. It is also helpful to provide students with a sample service-learning contract (to be signed by the agency supervisor and the student). It should detail the service responsibilities of the agency and the student and identify expected learning outcomes. The students' contracts should be completed early in the semester.

During the Semester

Allow class time (on a regular basis) for discussions about placements, problems, disappointments, integration of service, readings, and classroom discussions or lectures. The process of structured reflection is central to service-learning: students need to reflect upon their service experiences vis-à-vis their readings and class-

room experiences, yet do so in ways that do not feel overly structured or predetermined. The success of structured reflection depends to a large extent on the degree to which service placements are closely related to the course topic and learning objectives.

At the End of the Semester

In many ways, service-learning courses resemble all other courses on campus: evaluations are essential to understanding what works and what doesn't. Be sure to include time for feedback from students on their service-learning experiences during the formal course evaluation period. Then, incorporate information gained in the service-learning evaluations into the course in subsequent semesters. Finally, provide the Service-Learning Center with information on your course, so it can be included in publications provided to students and faculty.

Service-Learning Requires Passion for Teaching

Service-learning is not necessarily easy. It takes time, energy, and commitment to move beyond the old teaching habits with which we have grown comfortable. In particular, teachers must think carefully about matching the nature of their course content with experiential and community-based learning components. Teachers therefore must ask a number of key pedagogical questions, including:

What kind of service is appropriate for the central ideas, questions, and objectives of the course I teach?

What kind of service will enhance the student's understanding of the subject matter?

How will the service experiences of the students affect the nature of the course?

And perhaps most importantly, teachers need to ask:

What are the needs of the community agencies and service 'recipients' and how will the service component of my course affect the community?

Reasons to Run the Other Direction

Service-Learning can be a bit frightening to some for several reasons. First, since it is a fairly new pedagogy, many who practice it

Words from the Wise



"We learn through experience and experiencing, and no one teaches anyone anything. . . . If the environment permits it, anyone can learn whatever he/she chooses to learn; and if the individual permits it, the environment will teach him/her everything it has to teach."

Viola Spolin, *Improvisation for the Theatre*, 1963

"The function of the university is not simply to teach bread-winning, or to furnish teachers for the public schools or to be a centre of polite society; it is, above all, to be the organ of that fine adjustment between real life and the growing knowledge of life, an adjustment which forms the secret of civilization."

W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903

"Life's what you see in people's eyes; life's what they learn, and having learnt it, never, though they seek to hide it, cease to be aware of what? That life's like that, it seems."

Virginia Woolf, "An Unwritten Novel,"
Monday and Tuesday, 1921

"The notion of looking on at life has always been hateful to me. What am I if I am not a participant? In order to be, I must participate."

Saint-Exupéry, *Flight to Arras*, 1942

□ continued from page 3

are still in the process of discovering for the first time its relevance to their disciplines. Thus, while there is plenty of room for those who wish to make their own contribution to this innovative method of teaching, there are few mentors and gurus to guide the way.

Second, service-learning challenges teachers' normative relationships with power and vulnerability in that it shifts the locus of control away from the teacher; usually means more discussion and less lecture in the classroom; involves making contact with the world outside the classroom (the community); requires asking others to work with us as teachers in a collaborative, service-learning mode; and complicates the assessment of learning outcomes.

How to Find Out More About Service-Learning

For those willing to brave such challenges, service-learning is exciting, dynamic, and empowering to all involved. If you would like to learn more about service-learning . . .

(1) Visit the Service-Learning Center in the UMC.

(2) Read the brand new first edition of *The University of Colorado at Boulder Service-Learning Handbook*, which is intended as a primer for faculty and instructors new to service-learning. Copies can be obtained from the Service-Learning Center (Campus Box 106; phone: 492-5726). Subsequent questions can be addressed to Robin Crews (phone: (303) 492-7718; Email: crews@csf.colorado.edu) or staff at the Center.

(3) Browse through additional service-learning publications and materials in the Service-Learning Center.

(4) Review selected publications listed in the bibliographies of *The University of Colorado at Boulder Service-Learning Handbook*.

(5) Review syllabi relevant to your course, discipline, or department in the Service-Learning Center or in the Service-Learning Archives on the Internet (Gopher address: csf.colorado.edu; WWW address: http://csf.colorado.edu).

(6) Discuss your interest in transforming your course into a service-learning course with your program or department chair.

(7) Contact Robin Crews, Cathy Comstock—who is chair of the Service-Learning Faculty Council, or any faculty who are members of the Service-Learning Faculty Council to discuss specific questions you might have about first steps.

(8) Stop by the Graduate Teacher Program office, located in Norlin Library in Room S461, to peruse a collection of articles on service-learning. ■

Robin Crews is chair of the University of Colorado at Boulder Service-Learning Steering Committee.

The University of Colorado at Boulder is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution.



Graduate Teacher Program Newsletter

Campus Box 362
University of Colorado at Boulder
Boulder, CO 80309-0362



TO ALL:
Graduate Part-Time Instructors
Graduate Teaching Assistants
Teaching Faculty
Boulder Campus

