



Should Only Students Learn and Grow?

By Robert G. Bringle, Center for Service and Learning

David Mathews at the Kettering Foundation, asks, "Why do we need more than a vocational education?" His answer is, "In part, because we live more than a vocational life: we live a larger civic life and we have to be educated for it." What are the attributes of a civically educated student? How can educators provide experiences that promote civic growth in their students? What types of evidence can indicate that growth has occurred? How can being civically oriented be related to the discipline or profession? Staff in the Center for Service and Learning have been working on the answers to these questions during the past several years. In addition, last year, we expanded the focus of those questions beyond students to include the civic growth of faculty, administrators, and community partners.

Not everyone in the academy accepts responsibility for the civic growth of students. Some faculty contend that they were trained in a discipline/profession, hired to teach in that discipline/profession, and take seriously the responsibility to impart knowledge on that discipline/profession. Irv Altman, a social psychologist, contends that along with foundational knowledge (disciplinary content and cross-disciplinary knowledge) and professional knowledge (practitioner skills and content), socially responsive knowledge should be an integral part of a curriculum. There are three goals for socially responsive knowledge "first, to educate students in the problems of society; second, have them experience and understand first-hand social issues in their community; and third, and most important, give students the experiences and skills to act on social problems" (Altman, 1996, pp. 375-376).

How can the challenge of educating future generations include socially responsive knowledge in a manner that is pedagogically sound? How can educators prepare students for active participation in democratic processes in their communities? How can students acquire the philanthropic habits that will enrich their lives and contribute to their communities both through their professional roles and through their roles as citizens?

Altman noted that socially responsive knowledge can best be emphasized in higher education through service learning. There is now accumulating evidence that service learning can achieve the goal of producing civic-minded graduates. We view civic-minded graduates as being dedicated to pursuing studies to increase their capacity to engage in a career or lives that can address issues in society. Students with this level of integration are involved in their communities and committed to making a difference and improving the lives of others. These civic-minded students are motivated to learn because they know that the knowledge and skills they acquire can equip them to make a difference in society.

CSL staff have articulated the characteristics of civically oriented student as being someone who has: (a) academic knowledge, (b) knowledge of volunteering and nonprofit sector, (c) knowledge of social issues, (d) communication skills, (e) diversity skills, (f) self-efficacy, and (g) intentions to be civically involved. We have developed a survey and a written assignment that can be used to provide evidence for how civic-minded students are. These assessment procedures can be used in service learning courses as reflection activities and assessment strategies, to evaluate co-curricular programs that deepen civic learning, and to assess the contributions that IUPUI makes to producing civic-minded graduates.

During 2010-2011, we also involved community partners, faculty, students, and staff in five meetings to explore the development of civic-mindedness beyond students. Participants were asked to focus attention on the civic development and growth of faculty, administrators (i.e., executive leadership, deans, chairs, staff supporting civic engagement), staff at community-based organizations, and residents (or clients of those organizations).

Participants supported the view that civic-mindedness is a concept that is applicable to each of these other groups. They also gave concrete examples of ways in which activities, interventions, and resources could be used to develop a curriculum for the civic growth of each of the groups. Their answers also raised intriguing questions that are yet to be explored. How can relationships between these campus constituencies and the community groups be a basis for civic growth? Will civic growth for constituencies other than students be defined differently? How can this work strengthen the nonprofit sector and communities? How are the pedagogies or interventions civic in nature? Do we need alternative pedagogical approaches (e.g., Civic Reflection) to develop civic learning with different constituencies and in different settings?

The answers to these questions will provide critical elements to the future development of the civic purposes of higher education in America. Again, IUPUI is on the cutting edge of exploring these issues for constituencies beyond students. If you would like to join us, let me know.

References:

Altman, I. (1996). Higher education and psychology in the millennium. *American Psychologist*, 51, 371-378.