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## EDUCATING FOR CITIZENSHIP THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

### The Advisor's Role

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*The author states that most advisors do not have enough information about experiential learning opportunities in their communities to encourage their universities to become involved in offering these opportunities to their students. In this article, the author identifies some successful experiential learning programs, discusses possible Learning outcomes of such programs, and explains the advisor's role in such an activity.*

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#### INTRODUCTION

Academic advisors spend much of their time helping students choose appropriate courses to meet their educational goals and the university's distribution requirements. Little attention is paid to the inclusion of experiential learning into an advisee's degree program despite the fact that most people learn best by doing and by integrating concrete experience and theoretical knowledge (Kolh, 1984). While many colleges and universities do offer experiential learning opportunities and internship programs, generally academic advisors have not been as knowledgeable about these options as they are about course descriptions and major requirements.

#### Educating for Citizenship

Most educators discuss the value of experiential learning for students in terms of career exploration, acquisition of personal and job skills and beginning knowledge of the workplace. However, another aim of experiential programs is to educate for citizenship. Universities have long neglected this traditional goal (Newman, 1987). It is true that in recent years students have retreated from their involvement in community issues and, in an uncertain economic climate, have concentrated on educational programs which emphasize career preparation. Nevertheless, our country needs citizens who understand the political, social, and economic realities we confront and who are willing to work toward change. Universities have an obligation to provide the kinds of education which will prepare students to serve in volunteer roles ranging from ad-

tion. Experiential learning is one way in which students can gain the knowledge and skills needed to participate as useful and effective citizens and advisors can play a part in seeing that these opportunities are incorporated into the programs their advisees undertake.

### **Experiential Learning Programs**

In some institutions, academic advisors, faculty, and administrators have begun to develop innovative programs to facilitate student community service, and some schools have even instituted a service requirement for graduation. In addition, new national organizations such as Campus Compact, a coalition of college and university presidents who have committed themselves to providing community service options for their students and for youth across the country, and COOL, a student-centered organization focusing on literacy, are providing excellent resources and networking for university personnel who see community service and experiential learning as important to the curriculum. Federal legislation for a National Youth Service Act is being debated (Democratic Leadership Council, 1988) and in 1987 Congress allocated money to be dispensed by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) for the development of new models of exemplary university community service programs. A number of exciting projects have been approved and funded which could be replicated on other campuses, and students who have learned about the opportunities have responded enthusiastically. Such programs range from community-based internships to seminars and course assignments that take students out of the classroom and into schools, housing projects, and community agencies and organizations.

Some examples of FIPSE-funded active learning projects students have undertaken in the last year include a program at American University in Washington, D.C., in which an educational partnership has been formed with Lincoln Junior High School. The school is located in a neighborhood which houses the most recent immigrants in the city. Sophomores and juniors at the University submit proposals based on the needs of the school and carry them out after they have been accepted by the two institutions. Many of the projects focus on literacy.

At Kansas State University, a University Community Service Center has been formed under the direction of the vice president for Institutional Advancement and a center coordinator. One of their projects will be carried out in cooperation with the Kansas Department of Commerce PRIDE office. Rural Kansas communities will serve as hosts for students who work on a number of needed volunteer activities in their areas.

At the Bronx Community College in Brooklyn, New York, the school's athletic director has developed a joint student, faculty, and staff project in which all work together to run a food co-op for residents of the south Bronx as well as the community college.

While these projects generally involve the traditional college-age student, the FIPSE community service project at Metropolitan State University, initiated by an academic advisor, is aimed at the adult students the university was founded to serve. Internships in a variety of agencies and organizations and community-based seminars have

been developed that meet the adult students' educational goals and fit into their busy schedules. Almost three hundred students are expected to have registered for these credit-bearing options by the end of the year.

### Learning Outcomes

A number of learning outcomes related to citizenship can be achieved through these community service programs and others like them. Some outcomes are 1) an opportunity to study ethical issues and to apply an ethical framework to real life situations; 2) greater understanding and analysis of local and societal problems and possible solutions; 3) and knowledge of other cultures and diverse viewpoints which will assist the student in going on to work with others of different backgrounds and ideas toward some common goals and the common good (Little, n.d.).

### The Advisor's Role

What is the academic advisor's role in fostering this kind of participation and type of learning? First, we must learn more about the active learning options that are available on our own campuses. Next, we need to become more proactive in recommending these opportunities to our advisees and in seeing that such programs are a part of the total university experience for students. To these ends, we can do the following things:

- 1) Serve as catalysts in initiating community service projects or other experiential learning opportunities on campus and work with faculty to see that active learning is incorporated into classroom learning as well. One way to start is to review the resources available from the National Society for Internships and Experiential Learning (NSIEL) and other groups promoting civic learning.
- 2) Serve on university committees promoting both experiential learning and a return to the university mission of educating for citizenship.
- 3) Work to see that experiential learning, internships, and service projects are integrated into the university program and are not peripheral to the curriculum.
- 4) Form a network with others on campus working in experiential program areas to gather information advisors can share with students.
- 5) Encourage students to undertake community service for any of the reasons cited—acquisition of personal and professional skills, better understanding of self and others, and greater knowledge of the community. We must link these reasons with the advisee's own career and life goals over the life span.
- 6) Help students reflect on their community-based learning; assist advisees as they analyze and synthesize the experience. This can be done in one-to-one meetings and through seminars and journaling.
- 7) Participate as volunteers. It is necessary for us to serve as models to students and others as active citizen volunteers, for, if we believe that it is important

Advisors should take a leading role in encouraging the university to open or increase active community learning opportunities for students. We must also learn more about the programs presently available and then link advisees to the appropriate community service resources according to the student's interests and goals. Students gain many benefits from such learning, including greater self-understanding and esteem, new skills and knowledge, and a better sense of their obligations as citizens in a democracy. One of the goals of the university should be to educate students in ways that demonstrate the importance of active, involved citizenship so that they will leave our institutions committed to participation in the affairs of the republic and to working together toward peaceful and equitable solutions to perceived problems.

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