



History of Service-Learning in Higher Education

Source: *National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, January 2008*

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Service and Service-Learning on Colleges and University Campuses

Community service and civic engagement have a long history on American campuses beginning in the 19th century and finding revitalization in the 1960s, 1980s, and today. For example, community service activities in Greek-letter organizations and campus faith-based groups have had an enduring presence on campuses. The civil rights movement of the 1960s, and the formation of the [Peace Corps](#) in 1961, and Volunteers in Service to America ([VISTA](#)) in 1965 brought a new passionate energy to activist education by engaging young people and giving them real opportunities to make a difference in the world. It was during this time period that the early pioneers of the service-learning movement began to emerge and attempted to combine 'service' to 'learning' in a direct and powerful way.

In 1969, these pioneers and others concerned with higher education and community service met in Atlanta to discuss the pros and cons of service-learning and the importance of implementing these types of programs in American colleges and universities. Sponsors included the Southern Regional Education Board, the City of Atlanta, Atlanta Urban Corps, Peace Corps, VISTA, and the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The participants in the conference came up with the following recommendations:

- Colleges and universities should encourage students to participate in community service, help to make sure that academic learning is a part of this service, and to give academic recognition for that learning.
- Colleges and universities, private organizations, and federal, regional, and state governments should provide the opportunities and funds for students wanting to participate in service-learning.
- Students, public and private agency officials, and college and university faculty should all participate in the planning and running of service-learning programs.

Since that first conference service-learning scholars and participants have been advocating for these same recommendations, and the vibrant and vital discussion of the best practices and ideas for service-learning continues to this day.

Revitalization in the 1980-90s

The early to mid 1980s saw a resurgence of interest in campus service and service-learning, with a national initiative to promote service among undergraduate students. National service efforts were launched across the country, including the Campus Outreach Opportunity League (1984), which helps to mobilize service programs in higher education; the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (1985),



which helps replicate youth corps in states and cities; National Youth Leadership Council (1982), which helps to prepare future leaders; and Youth Service America (1985), through which many young people are given a chance to serve. And in 1985 the Education Commission of the States began [Campus Compact](#).

The period from 1989-1990 saw the creation of the Office of National Service and the Points of Light Foundation in order to foster volunteering at a national level. This led to the National and Community Service Act of 1990, which was passed by Congress and signed by President George H.W. Bush. The legislation authorized grants for schools to support service-learning and demonstration grants for national service programs to youth corps, nonprofits, as well as colleges and universities. It also created the organization Serve America whose goal was to “distribute grants in support of service-learning in order to simultaneously enrich the education of young people, demonstrate the value of youth as assets to their communities, and stimulate service-learning as a strategy to meet unmet community needs.”

In 1993 President Clinton approved legislation that repositioned Serve America, as well as the AmeriCorps and Senior Corps programs, under one roof with the creation of Learn and Serve America.

Service-Learning in Higher Education Today

The present moment of renewed attention to the civic mission of universities has been called the “fourth wave” of higher education civic engagement initiatives. This wave is a forward-looking vision at the future of higher-education itself. We are seeing a movement beyond efforts to bring civic engagement to individual classrooms. Instead there is a push toward a fully-engaged university as a whole: active, vibrant partnerships of scholars, as well as students and citizens who have the support and resources to achieve phenomenal things in education and in transforming communities nationwide.

Who is Supporting the Colleges and Universities That Are Doing Service-Learning?

Learn and Serve America

Learn and Serve America ([LSA](#)) provides direct and indirect support to K-12 schools, community groups, and higher education institutions to facilitate and support service-learning projects. LSA is the largest funder of service-learning programs, supplying grant support for school-community partnerships as well as colleges and universities. It provides training and technical assistance to faculty, teachers, administrators, parents, and schools, as well as the collecting and disseminating of research, effective practices, curricula, and program models so that the highest quality of service-learning is made available for students.

The higher education grants are awarded by LSA in two different ways. Funds may be awarded to individual institutions that operate service-learning programs within their schools in order to support those programs. Also, Higher Education Consortia grants are made to a lead organization, which may be a college, university, or nonprofit organization, for a consortium of higher education institutions. In this case, the lead organization has fiscal responsibility for doling out monies to the other institutions within the consortium to implement and promote service-learning activities.

President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll

Learn and Serve America also administers [The President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll](#), launched in 2006, which recognizes institutions of higher education that support exemplary student community service and service-learning programs. The Honor Roll encourages growth in the number of college students engaged in community service and service-learning each year, and helps to highlight colleges and universities that are setting the standard for higher education civic engagement.

In 2006, 493 institutions made the Honor Roll, with 141 receiving special 'With Distinction' recognition in acknowledgment of general excellence or for hurricane relief. The 2007 Honor Roll focused on general community service and service that supports improved high school graduation and college readiness of youth from disadvantaged circumstances.

Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse

Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse ([NSLC](#)) supports the service-learning community in higher education, K-12, community-based initiatives and tribal programs, as well as all others interested in strengthening schools and communities using service-learning techniques and methodologies.

NSLC maintains a website with timely information and relevant resources to support service-learning programs, practitioners, and researchers. The Clearinghouse also operates national email discussion lists for K-12, community based organization, higher education service-learning, as well as tribes and territories to encourage discussion and the active exchange of ideas. In addition, NSLC maintains an ever-growing library collection that is available to Learn and Serve America grantees and subgrantees.

Campus Compact

Campus Compact, formed in 1985 through the efforts of the presidents of Brown, Georgetown, and Stanford Universities, sought to highlight and support the best qualities of American college students – dedication, scholarship, and civic engagement. Campus Compact seeks to provide overall support for colleges and universities in order that they can engage their students and communities in flourishing partnerships of education and service. With this goal in mind, Campus Compact offers resources, training, research, and advocacy to higher education service-learning allowing it to thrive.

In 1988 there were two state Campus Compact offices. Now there are 32 with five more planned, including one in Puerto Rico. Today Campus Compact has 1100 members who represent an exciting community of 6 million students. And the future holds the promise of even more astonishing growth.

The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education – Community Engagement

Since 1970 when the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education first formulated the [Carnegie Classification](#), its classification of higher education institutions has been a highly effective tool for depicting diversity in colleges and universities. The current classification is a multi-faceted instrument that ranks institutions with an eye to curricula, student make-up, and the educational environment.

The *Community Engagement Elective Classification* is based on data collected from institutions on a voluntary basis. The aim of this classification is to present the level of involvement with the community partnerships that a college or university is undertaking. The classification is based on *Curricular Engagement* bridging the space between classroom and community; *Outreach* of service applied towards gaps in civic needs; and the *Partnerships* which are formed out of the active relationships between scholars, community, and the students.

Service-Learning and Community College

The vibrant service-learning movement is by no means restricted to four-year colleges and universities. The American Association of Community Colleges ([AACC](#)) helps promote higher education civic engagement to over a thousand associate degree-granting institutions nationwide. According to AACC surveys, almost sixty percent of community colleges offer some form of service-learning courses. And the number of other interested community colleges is growing rapidly.

The AACC's Community Colleges Broadening Horizons through Service Learning project, with support from LSA and the Corporation for National and Community service, seeks to support and grow service-learning with community colleges by providing information, technical assistance, materials and frameworks in order that community college students can participate in invigorating civic engagement partnerships.

Other Resources

Brief Historical Time Line www.servicelearning.org/filemanager/download/timeline.pdf

Annotated History of Service-Learning: 1862-2002 www.servicelearning.org/filemanager/download/142/SL_Comp_Timeline_3-15-04_rev.pdf

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