

Schwartzman, R., & Phelps, G. A. (2002). Beyond consumerism and utopianism: How service learning contributes to liberal arts ideals. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 13 (1), 57-81.

Beyond Consumerism and Utopianism: How Service Learning Contributes to Liberal Arts Ideals

Roy Schwartzman
Northwest Missouri State University

Greg A. Phelps
Lindsey Wilson College

The authors place service learning within the liberal arts tradition of empowering others to help themselves. Such a contextualization supplements visions of students as consumers or customers and education as a means to gain economic advantage in a competitive market. Their attention then turns to how even well-intentioned service-learning projects might be co-opted in ways that foster community dependence on the services offered. Effectively designed service-learning programs should offer a broad range of opportunities for social activism while encouraging critical reflection about the applicability of market-derived educational philosophies.

Community-based experiential learning, or what is now more often referred to as service learning, had its first flowering in the socially conscious decade of the 1960s. It has reemerged in the 21st century as a means of confronting apparent widespread student disengagement from traditional classroom instruction. By developing reciprocal connections between academic study and constructive social involvement, students presumably should be equipped, and motivated, to attain higher levels of proficiency in both academic and civic skills. The rationale behind this expectation is that students, in general, enter higher education with fairly strong social consciences developed, in part, from previous involvement in strong K-12 community service or service-learning programs or

both (Billig, 2000; Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002). Although the present generation of college students may seem ill-prepared for and indifferent to the academic demands placed on them by college and university professors, there is a growing interest in voluntary participation in efforts to improve the quality of life in local communities (Levine & Cureton, 1998). Correspondingly, many service-learning advocates claim that it can play an important role in preparing students for responsible citizenship (Battistoni, 1997; Brandell & Hinck, 1997; Clark, Croddy, Hayes, & Philips, 1997; Hepburn, 1997; Kinsley, 1997).

Hepburn (1997) provides a concise working definition of service learning as “active involvement in the local community as a constructive and natural extension of classroom citizen education” (p. 136). This definition, which we use throughout this essay, straightforwardly establishes the nexus between service learning and the acceptance of broad civic responsibilities that should be one of the primary outcomes of a four-year liberal arts education at an institution of higher learning. But the integration of service learning and the liberal arts ideal is something else that cannot be taken for granted. This article addresses the potentially counterproductive relationship between service learning and the liberal arts ideal in higher education. The authors, both of whom have experimented with service-learning components in their courses, assume that readers share our interest not only in implementing well-designed service-learning projects, but also in preserving what remains of liberal arts instruction in American higher education.

Lisman’s (1998) conclusion that “academic traditionalists [who] focus on education for its own sake . . . see little value in service learning” is overreaching in its scope (p. 56). We regard ourselves as both academic traditionalists and service-learning proponents. In endorsing service learning, however, we emphasize the need for reconciling its aims with those aims traditionally associated with liberal arts education. Our essay considers three issues raised by the service-learning movement in higher education, all of which relate to our concern about counter-productivity. First, we situate the objectives of service learning within discussions concerning the traditional goals of liberal education. This philosophical groundwork leads to a consideration of how service learning might serve to correct recent simplistic constructions of students as “consumers” or “customers” and education as a “commodity” that student-customers or their financial sponsors buy for the sole purpose of attaining economically privileged positions in competitive markets. We next investigate how well-intentioned service-learning projects might be co-opted in ways that foster community dependence on service-learn-

ing programs as sources of inexpensive or uncompensated student labor. Besides the issues that could be raised about exploitation of students in course-mandated service projects, such dependence could undermine the potential for structural solutions to social problems that might result in more productive and far-reaching change. Finally, we offer recommendations for a version of service learning that navigates between political indoctrination and value-free objectivity.

On a broader scale, our effort responds to the question posed by Jacoby (1996a): "How can service-learning research contribute to the development of more comprehensive theories of epistemology and learning?" (p. 325). This question assumes special significance given the pressing need to find out whether or not service learning can help to nurture in college students "the long-term development of a social ethic of caring, commitment, and civic engagement" that service-learning proponents desire (Giles & Eyster, 1998, p. 69). Such pedagogical and ethical issues emerge most clearly in service-learning projects that faculty coordinate for their classes. On many campuses, nonacademic offices such as Student Development or Career Services coordinate service-learning programs. Although the following discussion applies directly to service learning in conjunction with academic courses, the challenge remains for all service-learning efforts to extend beyond a self-serving resume line for student participants.

Connections Between Service Learning and Liberal Education

In the September 1999 issue of *University Business*, an advertising insert for a conference on higher education marketing posed a question and an answer with ominous overtones: "Is higher education for sale? You bet it is." This anecdotal slogan underscores Willimon and Naylor's claim that "[a] capitalist culture has a way of commodifying everything, even knowledge" (1995, p. 46). Put less hyperbolically, the potential for unrestrained and inappropriate application of the commodity metaphor is always present.

Our concern, therefore, is not with higher education's use of business models and terminology, but rather with their *misuse*. In fact, current management theory and practice offer valuable and transferable lessons, not only for rationalizing operations, but also in the areas of corporate responsibility and human relations. For example, the call for corporate accountability to the community was sounded far earlier and louder than the call for higher education to include stakeholders beyond employees

and students. One of the key lessons of stakeholder theory is that businesses are responsible to multiple constituencies with legitimate but often conflicting interests. Unfortunately, the fallacy common to many current higher education management fads is to place an inordinate emphasis on one stakeholder—the student-customer—to the neglect of other stakeholders. In addition, because the “customer” metaphor implicitly limits the roles of students, it has questionable utility in heightening higher education’s sense of obligation to students.

Classroom educators find themselves, therefore, in a double bind. On one hand, higher education administrators and vendors—often in complicity with faculty—jointly engage in technocratic agenda setting that is fundamentally at odds with the traditional aims of liberal education. For example, one of the author’s colleagues in Computer Information Systems speaks unself-consciously—indeed, even casually—of “teaching” software products to his students. This professor seems to have devolved into an on-site technical consultant for a leading software manufacturer and, one would think, into something much less than the computer scientist and professional educator he envisioned himself becoming earlier in his career. On the other hand, students pressure educators to teach them “how to be money-making machines” (Willimon & Naylor, p. 39). Between these two tendencies, higher education seems to be entangling itself in a predicament that Oakeshott described—or prophesied—some three decades ago:

A university needs to beware of the patronage of this world [of power and utility], or it will find that it has sold its birthright for a mess of pottage; it will find that instead of studying and teaching the languages and literatures of the world it has become a school for training interpreters, that instead of pursuing science it is engaged in training electrical engineers or industrial chemists, that instead of studying history it is studying and teaching history for some ulterior purpose, that instead of educating men and women it is training them exactly to fill some niche in society. (1989, p. 103)

The liberating ideal of liberal arts education as expanding the horizons of students and equipping them intellectually and morally to define their own possibilities now suffers under a narrowly vocational approach to pedagogy that, in too many instances, tilts heavily toward and caters to the cultivation of students’ anti-intellectual and amoral self-interest.

The liberal arts tradition, however, need not privilege classrooms as sites of liberal learning. Service learning and liberal education, while certainly not natural allies, are not necessarily incompatible. Thus, we

pose the question: How well do the philosophy and practice of service learning integrate with the ideals of liberal education?

Giamatti (1988) summarizes an ideal of liberal education that finds fuller expression in Newman's *The Idea of the University*: "A liberal education rests on the supposition that our humanity is enriched by the pursuit of learning for its own sake; it is dedicated to the proposition that growth in thought, and in the power to think, increases the pleasure, breadth, and value of life" (p. 121). Were service-learning programs to conform to this ideal, their justification would rest solely on their capacity to enrich the "power to think" and, correspondingly, to enable students "to express the results of [their] thinking in speech and in writing with logic, clarity, and grace" (pp. 122, 129-130, 136). Battistoni (1997) affirms that liberal education and service learning should have commensurate goals: "Service learning programs should aim at developing in students their critical-thinking skills" (p. 152). Specific vocational aims would be secondary and incidental to these goals, and would never constitute the *raison d'être* for service-learning projects. As Giamatti (1988) puts it, "If you pursue the study of anything not for the intrinsic rewards of exercising and developing the power of the mind but because you press toward a professional goal, then you are pursuing not a liberal education but rather something else" (p. 121); that is, the latter purpose is training to perform specific tasks rather than learning to innovate and adapt to change. Ideally, professional goals and liberal education would intersect by developing analytic skills built on a commitment to moral principles.

Ehrlich (1999) recognizes that service learning encourages types of intellectual discovery not normally encouraged in traditional classroom settings. Service learning enhances civic knowledge, which deals with how social institutions actually work, and moral learning, which involves "reinforcing the elements of character that lead to ethical actions" (p. 6). Reluctant to overclaim the benefits of service learning, Ehrlich observes instead that moral action becomes more likely when learners become conscious of their obligations toward others and their need to act cooperatively. Service learning certainly is not the only forum for these cooperative ventures. It does, however, offer an educational forum where students can become more aware of the conditions that generate the need for various social services. Effective service learning would tend to make students empathize with the receivers of the service rather than view them as helpless recipients of charity. This type of empathy may require aggressive encouragement. One service-learning practitioner comments, "Finally, and most problematic, most college students arrive immersed

in our consumer culture, and elective service-learning courses that champion the oppressed would have trouble finding takers at first" (Artz, 2001, p. 243).

Giamatti (1988) also says that "liberal education desires to foster a freedom of the mind that will also contribute, in its measure, to the freedom of others" (p. 124). This statement establishes that intellectual pursuits risk becoming at least as self-centered as economic endeavors. The quest for intellectual excellence can devolve into a selfish accumulation of knowledge without any obligation to share that knowledge with others who have not enjoyed the same educational privileges. Just as the acquisition of financial wealth carries with it a sense of obligation to others, the liberal arts liberate students from the illusion that knowledge contributes only to self-aggrandizement. Knowledge is power, but with service learning the power is the ability to use the knowledge gained for others' benefit rather than to exert power over others. By placing students in situations where they confront pressing social needs, service learning helps them avoid self-absorption and indifference to the aspirations of others. Participants in service learning can understand the necessity of maintaining the fragile, but fundamental, equilibrium between competing self-interests and communal social responsibilities. Or, to paraphrase a line from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have A Dream" speech, liberally educated persons realize that their destinies are bound to the destinies of others.

This brings us to what appears to be a more intuitive connection between service learning and liberal education: *contributing to the freedom of others*. Emphasizing the importance of service as an academic ideal, Boyer (1990) claims that "higher education and the rest of society have never been more interdependent than they are today . . . and . . . campuses [should] be more energetically engaged in the pressing issues of our time" (pp. 76-77). Service-learning programs are especially well suited for bringing college students and faculty into direct contact with societal concerns that classroom instruction tends to address only in abstract terms.

An important caution stems from Oakeshott's observation. The agenda for service learning should not be solely to train students for public service "careers." The capacities to think and to communicate cogently and compassionately, and to transcend the limits of self-interest, should not be pre-professionalized at the undergraduate level so that they become mere components of hyphenated career tracks. Not only does this mitigate the "learning for learning's sake" ideal, but, more importantly, it undermines the goal of "contributing to the freedom of others." Al-

though not necessarily incompatible, the goals of efficiency and productivity do differ from often time-consuming and cumbersome ideals of maximizing participation in the democratic process (Mejias, 2001). Insofar as it results in professional entitlements for an educated elite whose livelihoods will depend on an entrenched socioeconomic substratum, one might understand this point as the difference between educating for careers and education for caring. Service learning adds an important dimension that risks attenuation in consumer-focused educational philosophies. Rather than develop the technical skills of students, an orientation that critics such as Ellul (1990) believe reduces people to the economic functions they perform, service learning reminds participants that they collaborate with “those they work with as partners, as co-investigators of their ‘conditions of equality’” (Artz, 2001, p. 243).

McKnight (1995) warns that the professionalization of care-giving carries with it the risk that whole communities may become dependent on professional services and, in the process, lose their capacity for *self-caring*: “[O]ur problem is not ineffective service-producing institutions. In fact, our institutions are too powerful, authoritative, and strong. Our problem is weak communities, made ever more impotent by our strong service systems” (p. ix). Moreover, McKnight (1995) contends,

Service systems can never be reformed so they will “produce” care. Care is the consenting commitment of citizens to one another. Care cannot be produced, managed, organized, administered, or commodified. Care is the only thing a system cannot produce. Every institutional effort to replace the real thing is a counterfeit. (x)

All of the most important objectives traditionally associated with liberal education presume and, in fact, are quite meaningless apart from full engagement in the life of a community. Service learning, when properly conceived and implemented as a means of reengaging students with both the life of the community and the life of the mind, can do much to restore public confidence in, and the prestige of, liberal education.

How Can Service Learning Transcend Educational Consumerism?

While today’s undergraduates may appreciate the potential economic value of a college degree, they are much less interested in those aspects of collegiate life that seem to have little or no readily apparent relevance to their narrowly conceived career aspirations. Even among students who

accept the broader aims of liberal education, careerism is the main concern (Moffatt, 1989). This would include extracurricular activities, involvement in student government, and the admittedly obscure ideals of liberal education that many faculty members (including the authors of this essay) continue to profess. In other words, for this generation of undergraduates, “pursuit of academic goals is clearly utilitarian” (Levine & Cureton, p. 16). Correspondingly, students do not want to pay—either in time or money—for anything that they perceive to be ancillary to their economic self-interest—“In short, students increasingly are bringing to higher education exactly the same consumer expectations they have for every other commercial establishment with which they deal. Their focus is on convenience, quality, service, and cost” (Levine & Cureton, p. 14).

There is nothing wrong with students desiring economically secure futures. Similarly, pursuit of self-interest carries no necessary reduction of obligations toward others. The version of consumerism that has crept into higher education, however, often bears little resemblance to the complex combination of civic responsibility, enlightened self-interest, and adaptability to change that characterizes the most successful and socially aware corporations. At least as it might be defined in academic circles, the attenuation of social responsibilities in the face of this expanding consumerism reinforces the disjunction of rights and duties symptomatic of a growing “apathy and narcissism” at the expense of civic engagement (Etzioni, cited in Evers, 1990, pp. 145-146). Proponents of total quality management (TQM), for example, come very close to rendering quality synonymous with economy. Sutcliffe and Pollock (1992), who explicitly equate the customer with the student, define quality as providing whatever

- Satisfies the customer.
 - Is as cheap as possible.
 - Can be achieved in time to meet delivery requirements.
- (p. 12)

One interpretation of the third component, derived from industrial production models, would have educational institutions respond to urgent personnel needs of prospective employers. Clearly, most educational institutions find that decisions must be made primarily in consideration of cost limitations, especially since customer satisfaction and rapid response often demand substantial resources.

As it is being applied to higher education, the consumer or customer

metaphor becomes richer in terms of the inculcation of social responsibility, a task central to the service-learning initiative. When service learning enters the picture, pursuit of personal gain fits into the larger context of how such gain might contribute to causes that benefit others. The tendency to describe education narrowly in commercial terms should invigorate the search for more appropriate ways to conceptualize the role of education in a democracy. Service learning could supplement rather than supplant consumer-oriented educational philosophies by stressing the qualities of education that critics say consumerism de-emphasizes. Jacoby (1996a) sees the widespread adoption of certain practices borrowed from business, such as TQM and strategic planning, as opportunities to advocate greater rewards for service. Other commentators are less sanguine about these trends. Weigert (1998) decries the displacement of broader civic notions of education by a consumerist mentality that, incidentally, is at odds with the ethics of corporate responsibility outside of the academy. She complains that "the all-pervasive metaphor of the individual as a *consumer* crowds out such metaphors as *citizen* or *neighbor*, which capture and celebrate our interrelationships" (p. 3). Indeed, the "lip service" that academic institutions give to "the ideal of knowledge for its own sake and the common good" contrasts sharply with the stark reality that academics often adopt ideologies and terminologies of individual prosperity without concomitant community responsibility (Mendel-Reyes, 1998). Apparently this tendency among academics holds true empirically as well as philosophically.

Although faculty continue to tout the virtues of community service for students, data from the national faculty survey conducted by UCLA over the past decade show that few faculty actually engage in such service themselves (UCLA, 1999). Such data easily can be misconstrued like Putnam's (1996) conclusion about students: Declining participation must signify apathy. Rather, non-participation points to the need for integrating service opportunities into the curriculum rather than adding yet another layer to faculty and student obligations. For example, on one of our campuses, the president cancels classes on one day for faculty, staff, and students to participate in organized community service activities. Not surprisingly, many faculty and students abstain because such a well-intentioned measure positions service as a holiday from traditional methods of learning. The service opportunities appear as alternatives to classes rather than integral components of the total learning experience that includes class time and outreach. Thus, the displacement of citizenry and neighborliness by consumerism can be overcome by treating these concepts as complementary rather than antithetical.

An associated risk of the consumerist viewpoint in higher education is to treat whoever assumes the consumer role as an individual whose desires should be satisfied above all else, but the legitimacy and quality of these desires may escape notice. Additionally, if consumers of education are understood as “receivers” of services, they are minimally empowered to take active roles in shaping those services, whereas everyone in the educational process should share a stake and become a participant in creative activities (McMillan & Cheney, 1996). Service learning offers a much more interactive picture of education: Faculty, students, and community members collaborate to achieve common or interrelated goals.

Although service learning has been embraced by educational institutions, civic organizations, and corporations, it straddles the historic divide between educating students for democratic action and equipping them with skills transferable to the workplace (Lisman, 1998). Ideally, the citizen educated for democracy constantly strives for civic improvements, urging and agitating for changes that could bring about social justice for marginalized populations. This additional advocacy compensates for the prospect that a potential employee would merely advocate for the interests of the employer, leaving to chance the acquisition of civic skills that might be fostered along with job-related competencies through the liberal arts approach. The difference between these orientations sometimes comes down to prioritizing either equity or efficiency, and a healthy democracy needs both.

Lisman (1998) contends that the preoccupation with “consumerist politics” is incompatible with genuine service learning. The consumerist view holds that the distribution of resources results from market mechanisms that, while not always fair, do self-correct if left to themselves. This laissez-faire attitude toward social problems encourages minimal governmental intervention in economic and social life. In this atmosphere, service-learning efforts can replace the perceived need to address these issues through concerted governmental or corporate activism. Although the extant political and economic system might cause inequities, it also includes a ready supply of service learners to redress them. The problems of democracy do not seem systemic as long as socially conscious students can be mustered to patch minor flaws rather than correct endemic weaknesses in socioeconomic norms and practices (Lisman, 1998).

The roots and fruits of consumerism in education extend further. The idea that education should prepare students for the workforce certainly has merit, but the capacity for workplace productivity should extend to productive efforts in public life (Lisman, 1998). In fact, if future employ-

ees lack awareness of their social obligations, they could act irresponsibly in a corporate environment, failing to recognize their organization's responsibilities to various stakeholders in the communities served by the organization. Service learning helps remedy the narrow vocational focus on learning as the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills obtainable only through specific programs of study. Service learning is inherently interdisciplinary insofar as it encourages students and faculty to pool resources to address community needs, transcending rigid academic boundaries (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Efforts to develop effective service-learning programs should reduce the tendency of departments to become compartments, insulating students and faculty in a particular field from the benefits of studying outside their area of focus.

Service learning has the potential to complement consumerist tendencies, broadening the perspective of consumerism to stress greater social awareness. The evaluative standards employed by the Corporation for National Service (CNS) are replete with metaphors borrowed from the TQM movement in corporate America. The first three CNS criteria for programs engaged in service are as follows:

1. Our "customers" are the reason we exist. We must stay attuned to their needs and strive always to exceed their expectations.
2. Volunteers, participants, and staff are customers too. They must be motivated, trained, and satisfied if they are to serve our customers well.
3. It is not enough to talk about customer satisfaction. We must set measurable goals, communicate them throughout our organization, regularly and systematically gauge our progress against these goals, and take action to continuously improve our performance. (quoted in Mintz & Hesser, 1996, pp. 32-33)

The happy marriage between consumerism and service learning requires careful attention to the extent of reciprocity between server and served (Mintz & Hesser, 1996). Without this sense of partnership, service learning becomes an act of charity that reduces the autonomy of the people served until it renders them dependent on the care-givers. Barber (1990) balks at modeling civic activity after the marketplace. Like many others, he sees service as a way to offer models of social engagement that depart from competitive, adversarial relations that display the market at

its worst. While education may help prepare students for the workplace, the value of learning extends beyond its market value. A view of education can emerge that is informed by realistic market practices and the social obligations attendant to service learning. This hybrid viewpoint avoids both the narrow market-based view of education as selfish acquisition and the starry-eyed, altruistic idealism of service learning as the panacea for all that ails democracy. Two senses of Dewey's call for experiential education thus unite in one vision. Vocational preparation, while important, does not exhaust the mission of education. Additionally, Dewey's vision of education implies that students should "better understand themselves and how they fit within a democratic society" (Rhoads, 1997, p. 210).

Service learning, insofar as it escapes from self-centered commercialism, could resolve the paradoxical pulls of academic freedom (with its price of ivory tower irrelevance to the surrounding community) and responsibility to an institution's many stakeholders: for instance, students, parents, and faculty. By placing members of the academic community amidst nonacademic persons and projects, service learning enlarges the scope of academic conversation to include more stakeholders beyond the academy's walls as participants (Goodman & MacNeil, 1999). Indirect evidence suggests that service learning and materialistic acquisitiveness are treated as incompatible, although they need not be. For instance, Astin's (1996, 1999) research shows that commitment to service tends to be lowest at institutions that place "resource acquisition" as a top priority.

How Does Service Learning Overcome Social Quietism?

Service learning has the capacity to contribute to intellectual and social liberation or, typically, to pursue social reforms incrementally without inviting sustained ideological critique. The synergies of service and learning should enable students "to challenge the guiding assumptions of the culture, to raise fundamental questions regarding contemporary social life, to foster reconsideration of that which is 'taken for granted,' and thereby to generate fresh alternatives for social action" (Gergen, 1982, p. 109). In sum, if service learning fits the paradigm of liberal education, it must, as we have emphasized already, "foster a freedom of the mind that will also contribute . . . to the freedom of others," instead of perpetuating a community's dependence on the services of professional elites (Giamatti, 1988, p. 124).

By extension, McGee (1982), in theorizing "materialist" rhetoric, sought

to show how concrete discourse should not play second fiddle to abstract theory. According to this view, rhetoric is “a natural social phenomenon” that signifies, solidifies, and alters social relationships (McGee, 1982, p. 38). What better way exists to observe, describe, practice, and critique these discursively engineered relationships than by participating in them at the grassroots level? Service learning offers a laboratory for the practice of materialist rhetoric in two ways. First, it provides a forum for participating in rather than theorizing about ways to instigate social change. Second, service learning supplies a testing-ground for communication theory. As a real-world laboratory to test theoretical claims, service learning accomplishes what Bowers (1968) implored all scholars to do: Use theory to generate hypotheses, then test them empirically. Theory and practice should have a cyclical relationship in service learning. Students learn principles and theories in their readings and class discussions. Then they apply and test these ideas in actual settings beyond the walls of the college classroom. The reverse process has equal validity: Students experience actual situations that service providers confront, then connect those experiences with theories and principles. Subsequent coursework builds on what the students learned from their experiences in the community. This experience either confirms, denies, or modifies what has been learned about academic subjects. New or modified ideas about theory-in-practice then can be tested in other community-based experiences. This continuous cycle of promulgating ideas, testing them in the community, then modifying the ideas and retesting them epitomizes science at its best, but with one difference. The laboratories are not ideal, controlled environments, but the natural settings of everyday practice or contexts for field observations.

Service learning offers a site for the interaction of theory with practice, but it also tests the extent of social activism. Students visiting nursing home residents, for example, can accomplish quite a lot of good. For the residents, students provide needed social interaction and connections with other life contexts. For the students, the residents provide, among other things, opportunities for inter-generational communication experiences and practice in empathic listening skills. Nevertheless, the service-learning curriculum can and should do more. For instance, it should challenge students to question economic and social decision making that creates such institutions. These institutions exist, ostensibly, to provide around-the-clock health care for people who have outlived their economic usefulness, who may interfere with the economic usefulness of family care-givers, and whose economic usefulness is sometimes extended by providing profit centers for health-care professionals and large

corporations. Service activity alone, without theoretical reflection, poses the risk of covering the symptoms of deep-rooted social problems with band-aid solutions, not confronting the causes of these problems and the potentially greater dangers they present to communities (Lisman, 1998). We have in mind the cultivation of activism akin to what Donna Duffy of Middlesex Community College endorses. After participating in community work with people who have psychological disorders, her students typically ask, "Why aren't we doing more to develop resilience in our communities and ourselves?" (Chamberlin, 2000, p. 48).

Instead of accelerating social improvement, service learning may actually threaten it by causing job displacement. If service learners could perform many tasks currently performed by paid employees, it would be more economical to rely on the unpaid labor. This possibility becomes more likely if service learners infuse labor sectors where the existing labor force is relatively unskilled and, thus, more susceptible to replacement by temporary or minimally trained workers (Oi, 1990). Since many community service agencies suffer from chronic under-staffing and minimally trained employees, the risk of job displacement as an unintended consequence of service learning poses a real threat:

Properly designed service-learning programs can minimize the risk of job displacement, however. The argument about job displacement posits a direct tradeoff between service-learners and existing workers. Second, it assumes service-learners would disproportionately occupy jobs that the most vulnerable segments of the workforce now hold. To avoid job displacement, service-learners should occupy positions that would not have been filled otherwise. (Moskos, 1990)

Oi (1990) estimates that more than five million jobs could be staffed by unpaid service workers. He questions the value of such voluntary labor, claiming that organizations would have little incentive to train large numbers of temporary workers. Sometimes organizations are willing to train service learners, but they may lack the resources to do so. If many personnel suddenly infuse an organization, they may outstrip the organization's ability to prepare or supervise the new recruits (Gardner, 1997). Such a situation highlights the importance of gauging not only the need but also the infrastructural capability of organizations linked to service learning. If an organization expresses a need for assistance, that request does not necessarily mean that more is better. Service-learning supervisors should determine the maximum number of personnel an organization can train and monitor properly. This number might be far fewer than the number of workers an organization wants. Academic in-

stitutions can include specific qualifications for choosing service-learning sites so that the risk of job displacement becomes minimal. San Jose City College, for example, stipulates that a site may be chosen only if the agency will continue to provide services without the aid of student labor.

Caveats and Recommendations

To improve the chances of developing a successful service-learning program, it is important to anticipate potential impediments so they can be avoided or minimized (Kolenko, Porter, Wheatley, & Colby, 1996). Service learning is no panacea for the maladies of higher education. Although it fits well with the imperative to instill in students an ethic of participatory democracy, improperly administered programs easily can subvert even the best intentions. The suggestions in the following sections offer some direction in addressing consumerism, social activism, and educational technology via service learning.

Explore the Metaphoric Potential of Service Learning

Palmer (1993) points out that “our culture and institutions tend to take shape around our dominant metaphors of reality, and to hold that shape long after our metaphors have changed” (p. xiv). If this is so, then we need to pay close attention to the metaphors we use to discuss higher education and service learning. Several alternative metaphors may reduce the pernicious implications of the student-as-customer metaphor. A productive alternative would be to enrich the metaphoric repertoire surrounding education, broadening the vision of students by recognizing their roles as revealed through service learning. While no single metaphoric framework provides an exhaustive description of the educational process, service learning introduces at least two relevant metaphors that expand perspectives on education beyond a market focus.

Concerned that communities might be treated as outsiders or guests beholden to academics gracious enough to serve them, Goodman and MacNeil (1999) suggest the metaphor of family. A family’s well-being requires mutual dependence among all members without creating hierarchies of value. The community, students, and academic institutions participate in a familial relationship because each contributes something to the other’s development. Unlike commercial relationships governed by contracts and caveats, healthy familial relationships foster open dialogues among equals. Consumerism obscures the extent of reciprocity

between server and served (Mintz & Hesser, 1996). The familial attitude has far greater affinity with service learning than the commercial mindset. But the metaphor of family demands further scrutiny, both as an alternative to consumerism and as an apt description of service learning.

The family metaphor implies unwavering, unconditional loyalty—a condition that can devolve into dependency. Improperly constructed service-learning efforts risk becoming dysfunctional families, with the beneficiaries of service defined as perpetual children—“dependents” in that they never learn to help themselves. A more critical attitude toward the communities forged through service reveals other possibilities, however. Service learning does teach how to form partnerships between academics and communities, but it also should teach how to redefine or sever those partnerships. Far from abandonment, severing a relationship with a community organization could signify the organization’s maturation into self-sufficiency. Thus, the severance becomes analogous to the maturation of a dependent child into a responsible adult. Although families expect loyalty and obedience, the service relationship invites a less hierarchical arrangement of cooperation so that the community comes to rely less and less on external support. In a healthy family, the children grow up, become more independent, and, in their turn, assume the role of parenting.

Concerns about dependency motivate exploration of a different metaphor: students as partners with the community in addressing unmet social needs (Artz, 2001; Barber & Battistoni, 1993). The partnership model suggests that academic institutions solicit advice from the community about how to educate students as well as provide advice to the community about how to tackle social issues. The partner metaphor also creates a productive bridge between business practice and liberal arts ideals. A partnership restores conditionality to the service relationship, thus recognizing that community relations are negotiated rather than assumed. Instead of being the knights in shining armor who rescue communities from their own mistakes, service learners recognize the lessons they can learn from the community. The relationship is reciprocal, with the community teaching lessons unavailable in traditional classroom settings. In the words of Jacoby (1996b), “Service-learning encourages students to do things *with* others rather than *for* them” (p. 8).

Examine Whose Social Agenda Service Learning Serves

Because it essentially places the stamp of approval on the organiza-

tions and causes that students serve, service learning has an inherently political dimension (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996). Students who participate in service learning might be expected to become social activists, instigating social change. In fact, a central principle of service learning has been identified as the contribution to “the larger struggle to improve social conditions” (Rhoads, 1997, p. 221). This drive for social improvement, while laudable, presents a quandary. Unless a universal good is identified, students will serve particular interests. But whose interests? This question invites reflection on the political agenda service learning serves.

Service learning must steer a delicate path between indoctrination and value-neutrality (Ehrlich, 1999). There remains some risk that the interests served in service learning may reflect disproportionately the social commitments and political attitudes espoused by the professor. Fear of indoctrination became especially acute when, during the Clinton administration, proposals arose for a national service initiative. The basic argument is that whenever service becomes mandatory, it reflects the ideological commitments of whoever sponsors the service, be it the government, the professor, or the educational institution (Postrel, 1990). Some critics have claimed that the projects that fulfill the mandatory service requirements in Maryland schools (the first to institute mandatory service as a graduation requirement statewide) qualify as thinly disguised political advocacy (Finn & Vanourek, 1995). But all service acquires a political hue when it originates from the recognition that current conditions are less than ideal and should be ameliorated. Objections to the political side of service tend to target only those political agendas that the critic opposes.

Professors’ attempts to avoid indoctrinating students into particular value systems through service learning could prove debilitating. Refusal to acknowledge the role of values would fail to equip students to render “their own moral and civic judgments” (Ehrlich, 1999, p. 7). Instructors must consider carefully not only the merits but also the ideological implications of the service-learning projects they approve. Aside from matching students with projects, it is important to balance the interests that the projects serve. For example, a group of students who choose to promote and distribute birth control devices at community health clinics could encounter opposition from antagonistic groups. To counter the contention that service learning primarily serves a narrow segment of the ideological spectrum, potential projects should be selected to benefit widely divergent constituencies. The students who distribute birth control devices, for example, could be part of a class that includes service at

an adoption agency or a pregnancy counseling center. The same students could rotate among ideologically different organizations, or different groups of students could serve various organizations. Without such ideological balance, service learning becomes vulnerable to accusations that it promotes political interests under the guise of altruistic service. Professors, therefore, have an obligation to “avoid simply inculcating our own views” (Ehrlich, 1999, p. 9) while upholding moral commitments to serve so that students can make their own ethical judgments instead of floating in a relativistic stupor.

The best way to cope with the political implications of service learning may be to acknowledge them outright rather than attempt to maintain the notion that service can remain apolitical. Few service agencies will prove acceptable to every ideological persuasion. Recognizing the determination of acceptable service projects in a politically charged environment as perhaps the “thorniest controversy” surrounding service learning, Goldsmith (1995) suggests that students play an active role in choosing their projects. Aside from democratizing the selection of service agencies, we recommend that the choices arise collaboratively from input by faculty, placement or service centers, and students. By broadening the sources of input, no narrow range of ideologies will reap the lion’s share of benefits from student service. In this way, a professor’s (or anyone else’s) own political leanings will not skew the service options so only one type of organization monopolizes the labor pool. Consistent, thorough disclosure of a service agency’s mission, funding sources, and history also will help students and service placement personnel make informed decisions about where to place students. In addition to revealing an agency’s political orientation or connections, rigorous disclosure should improve the match between student and organization.

The political agendas and constituencies of service-learning agencies can become part of the reflective process. To determine the political orientation of service-learning agencies, students in courses such as sociology, political science, or social work could trace the sources of funding, objectives, methods, and sponsors of these organizations. Such information would prove useful for institutions to provide a broad range of organizations from which students may select their service projects. By clarifying the sponsorship of organizations and their preferred methods of addressing social issues, an academic institution can balance its volunteer efforts so that no one type of organization receives a disproportionate supply of labor. One University of North Carolina professor who teaches a course on social movements requires student volunteers

to identify the goals of the service agency and the audiences it tries to reach (University of North Carolina, 1993). Knowing this information before embarking on service projects would help to avoid overloading some agencies or engaging in service projects inconsistent with the mission of the course or academic institution.

Learn From "Technological Adoration"

An important lesson can be learned from the "technological adoration" that seems to have overwhelmed society in general and, especially, higher education (Postman, 1995, p. 38). Infatuation with technological fixes is predicated on the belief that educational problems are technological rather than moral or spiritual. Both Palmer (1993) and Postman (1995) argue that almost all of the really important problems in education are moral or, we might say, relational in nature. Consequently, technological solutions are not always attuned to the nature of the problems they are intended to remedy. Not only does this fact render such solutions prone to failure, but it also makes them more likely to be counterproductive regarding students' involvement in community life and service. Hepburn (1997) illustrates this concern in her description of ours as an "age of being socially disconnected" from direct contact with other people while being more thoroughly wired to electronic machines (p. 141).

Service learning potentially is subject to similar problems. Clients and customers with whom we engage for personal or professional aggrandizement do not warrant the same consideration we give to people with whom we have developed deeper relationships. The only really meaningful "freedom of others" we nurture in clients and customers is the freedom to become dependent on or indebted to us, which is not freedom at all. Some concern has arisen that discussions of service learning have moved toward treating service as an instrument for career advancement:

By framing service-learning as a way to get ahead in the business world, it is easy to minimize the conflicts that may arise between career imperatives and a citizen's concern for the public good. In the long run, this perspective on service-learning overlooks students' need for an invitation to public life—free from the pressures of career development and the market. In the process, these advocates forget that training for a career and for citizenship are not the same thing. (Mattson & Shea, 1997)

The differences between service-learning programs with a market fo-

cus and with a liberal arts focus, however, should not render them mutually exclusive or antagonistic. Rather, service learning supplements the professional goal of technical expertise with renewed attention to obligations toward others.

Mattson and Shea (1997) continue to polarize professionalism and citizenship, urging a resolution of their purported conflict:

Though the tendency to define service-learning in professional and career terms has become more predominant over the years, many advocates still speak a language of democracy and citizenship. Resolving this internal debate is crucial, since it will help determine how advocates conceive of their efforts and the ideas they use to understand their work.

The resolution of this debate seems straightforward, as proven by the presence of service-learning initiatives in many business administration programs. Career orientation should expand to embrace the recognition that professional success involves commitments to the community as well as to one's self.

Our recommendation is not to abandon the parlance and pressures of the marketplace altogether—an option that hardly seems realistic—but rather to assess critically their impact on the life of the community before accepting them. Concerning service-learning programs, we might pose questions such as those Postman (1992) would ask about technology, for example: To whom will they “give greater power and freedom?” and “Whose power and freedom will be reduced” by them? (p. 11). If service-learning practitioners routinely address these kinds of questions, we might gain more insight about the social impact of service-learning programs than we would by directing our questions exclusively at practical and technical concerns.

Conclusions

This article has sought to outline some of the criteria that should be taken into account when designing service-learning programs. Rather than specify the details of a program whose exact design and administration will be tailored to each community and academic institution, we offer an overview of the principles that should guide the particulars. As for the matter of establishing and sustaining service-learning efforts, Kolenko et al. (1996) identify several barriers, including the reluctance of faculty to participate in service, organizational resistance to perceived outsiders in the community, limited institutional funding, and a lack of

recognition of its value in promotion and tenure considerations. To get to the point of dealing with these concerns, however, service-learning programs first must be proposed and advocated. Before questions of service learning's practical implementation can arise, its champions must convincingly demonstrate that it contributes to an institution's educational mission while strengthening ties to the surrounding community. This study represents an attempt to articulate how service learning could do that.

We harbor no illusions about the difficulty of creating service-learning programs that fulfill the criteria discussed in this essay. But research should move toward examining which types of practices best meet the ideals encouraged through service learning. As recently as 1997, Bradley could assert that "there is not a lot of research that supports the claims made by service-learning advocates" (p. 152). As Giles and Eyler (1998) remark, "In short, we need to synthesize research and practice just as service and learning are themselves integrated" (p. 70). Ultimately, the test of the scholarship on service learning lies in the successful implementation of service-learning programs that are sensitive to the kinds of issues we have attempted to outline.

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Roy Schwartzman is associate professor of communication and basic course director in the department of communication and theatre arts at Northwest Missouri State University. He was awarded a 2001 Missouri Campus Compact grant to incorporate service learning into the senior capstone course for communication majors. **Greg A. Phelps** is associate professor of communication at Lindsey Wilson College, where he teaches courses in Intercultural Communication, Issues Management, Leadership, Persuasion, and Public Speaking. His work has been published in the *Arkansas Business and Economic Review*, *Iowa Journal of Literary Studies*, and *Public Relations Review*.