Elevating the Service in Service-Learning

Michael Karlberg

This article argues that service-learning should be re-defined as a pedagogy that cultivates an orientation toward the welfare of others characterized by a sense of mutualistic interdependence rather than competitive individualism. A rationale for this definition is provided, followed by an examination of cultural and institutional obstacles to its implementation. On the cultural level, the prevailing culture of contest presents one such obstacle. Within this culture, most public activities, including higher education, are structured as contests between self-serving rather than other-serving individuals. On an institutional level, entrenched tenure and promotion structures present another related obstacle. The article concludes by recommending several strategies for overcoming these obstacles.

The term service-learning means different things to different people. Some of these meanings have more to do with self-service than service-to-others. In this essay I argue that communication scholars need to elevate the service in service-learning by focusing our pedagogy more on service-to-others. To advance this argument, I begin by reviewing different ways the term service-learning is currently used. I then propose a re-definition of service-learning as a pedagogy that cultivates an orientation toward the welfare of others characterized by a sense of mutualistic interdependence rather than competitive individualism. After providing a rationale for this definition, and arguing for its relevance in the field of communication, I examine cultural and institutional obstacles to the implementation of this kind of service-learning. On the cultural level, I discuss the prevailing culture of contest as one such obstacle. On an institutional level, I discuss entrenched tenure and promotion structures as another obstacle. I conclude the essay by recommending various strategies for overcoming these obstacles.

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2000 Convention of the National Communication Association in Seattle, Washington.
DEFINING SERVICE-LEARNING

Service-learning traces its roots back to the turn of the twentieth century in the United States. These roots include the educational philosophy of John Dewey, as well as the early cooperative education movement that emerged from the University of Cincinnati. By the 1960s, college work-study programs were being established on college campuses and the phrase “service-learning” began to circulate. In the 1980s, groups such as Campus Compact began spearheading national efforts to promote service-learning in higher education and, by the 1990s, academics were widely debating the definition and merits of service-learning in conferences and scholarly journals (for a concise overview of this history, see Titlebaum, Williamson, Daprano, Baer, & Brähler, 2004).

Following the debates of the 1990s, service-learning has come to mean different things to different people. It is widely associated with the concept of experiential learning: learning by applying academic knowledge to the solution of practical problems in the world outside the classroom (e.g., Furco, 1996; Stanton, 1987). More narrowly, however, it is sometimes associated with the concept of internships: learning practical job skills, sometimes in a corporate setting, in preparation for entrance into the labor market (e.g., Krupar, 1994; Texter & Smith, 1999). Conversely, it is sometimes associated with volunteerism and citizenship training: learning civic commitments by volunteering time and energy outside the corporate sector (e.g., Giles & Eyler, 1994; Kettering Foundation, 1992; M. Smith, 1994). Finally, it is occasionally associated with social advocacy and social change: cultivating active social skills and commitments by engaging students in projects of social advocacy and change (e.g., Crabtree, 1999; Pollock, 1999).

Though no one of these meanings is necessarily “right” or “wrong,” the divergence among them makes it difficult to discuss service-learning without first clarifying how one is using the term. In the discussion that follows, I situate the term service-learning within the civic and social commitments embodied in the last two definitions above. Though corporate internships can provide
valuable learning opportunities, and there may be a legitimate place for them in some curricula, internships serve the individual interests of the students and employers who participate in them. In this context, there is value in reserving the concept of service-learning to refer to learning that derives from service to others (i.e., service to those in need, service to one's community and, more broadly, service to humanity as a whole). In this sense, service-learning can be defined as an experiential pedagogy that cultivates a service ethic in students. Or, stated another way, service-learning can cultivate an orientation toward the welfare of others characterized by a sense of mutualistic interdependence rather than competitive individualism.

Rationale

This approach to service-learning can be justified in a number of ways. To begin with, public universities do not exist simply to increase the private earning power of individual students or provide free intern labor for private corporations. They exist to serve broader public interests. As publicly financed institutions, public universities should be built upon a cornerstone of public service. One way this can be achieved is by cultivating a service ethic in students. This is not a new or radical idea. A century ago, one of the basic purposes of higher education in this country was to inculcate skills of citizenship and to train young people for public service (London, 1999, p. 25). However, in the early twentieth century, the research university model began to depart from these traditional goals (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1991, p. 153-156). As Barber (1997) explains, by the end of the second World War, "higher education had begun to professionalize, vocationalize, and specialize in a manner that occludes its civic and democratic mission" (p. xi).

Creating a service-oriented curriculum would thus be a renewal of, rather than a departure from, the original public service purpose of higher education. Indeed, when American public education first began to drift away from this original purpose, John Dewey was already sounding the alarm. Social life, Dewey pointed out, was undergoing a thorough and radical change. If education was to continue to have any meaning and
relevance, Dewey (1956) insisted that “it must pass through an equally complete transformation” by training every child for membership in their community and “saturating him with the spirit of service” (pp. 28-29).

Dewey’s warning fell largely on deaf ears. A century later, many cultural commentators believe that public life is not well in America. Competitive individualism, nihilism, and highly materialistic and acquisitive values have become the hallmarks of American culture (Barber, 1992; Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Putnam, 1995). This legacy has led many Americans to view community service as less important than “real work” and something that only the wealthy, the saintly, the guilty, or the naive engage in (Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Parks, 1996). Hence the “American Dream” is not a dream of mutualistic interdependence but a dream of competitive individual affluence.

If we want to improve the quality of public life in America, the cultivation of a service ethic through service-learning pedagogy is clearly warranted. Barber explains:

Serving others is not just a form of do-goodism or feel-goodism. It is a road to social responsibility and citizenship. When linked closely to classroom learning (“education-based community service”), it offers an ideal setting for bridging the gap between the classroom and the street, between the theory of democracy and its much more obstreperous practice... Service is an instrument of civic pedagogy. (1997, p. xiii; parentheses in the original)

The concept of social capital sheds further light on the need to elevate service values in higher education. The traditional concept of private capital refers to all of those private assets – land, material resources, technology, and so forth – that enable a corporation to achieve financial prosperity. Social capital, on the other hand, refers to all of those public assets – attitudes, values, skills, relationships, and so forth – that enable a community to achieve social prosperity (Cohen, 1996; Harwood Group, 1991; Putnam, 1995).

The mission of American higher education has, over the past century, been increasingly diverted away from the generation of social capital and toward the generation of private capital. The values underlying this increasingly commercialized mission have
become deeply embedded in most universities through external funding priorities as well as internal resource allocations. These values are also reflected in the expectations that many students bring with them to university: that the primary purpose of a university education is to increase their earning power by preparing them for a lucrative career (Loeb, 1994). Finally, these values can even be seen within the literature on service-learning, including the communication literature, which sometimes defines corporate internships as service-learning (see Krupar, 1994).

The conflation of service-learning with corporate internships, and the values that underlie this kind of thinking, are a symptom of what communication scholar Stanley Deetz (1992) calls the "corporate colonization of the life world" (p. 13). When we reduce service-learning to corporate internships we are transforming our discipline into a vehicle for corporate welfare. Historically, employers assumed primary responsibility for on-the-job training of their employees. Now this training is heavily subsidized by taxpayers through public university programs – including communication programs. By subsidizing the generation of private capital in this manner we are diverting tax dollars away from other uses, such as the generation of social capital. Elevating the service in service-learning would help restore balance between the two.

By restoring this balance, universities might also regain the respect and support of many taxpayers who finance higher education yet feel they receive little benefit. Barber explains:

These revisions of the mission of education, aside from their possible impact on democracy, potentially have a crucial political payoff: they make schools more relevant to the needs of society generally and more pertinent to the concerns of citizens without school-age children. They thus offer taxpayers reasons to support the flow of tax dollars to education. (1997, p. xiv)

AGAINST THE GRAIN IN A CULTURE OF CONTEST

Of course, community service pedagogies run against the grain of our highly competitive and individualistic culture. Within this culture, we structure virtually every significant public activity as a contest between self-serving rather than other-serving
individuals or interest groups. We structure our governmental systems as partisan political contests; we structure our justice systems as legal adversary contests; and we structure our economic systems as contests of acquisition. We also structure most of our leisure and recreation activities as contests in which we are either participants or spectators. Finally, our media representations amplify and exaggerate the already competitive characteristics of all of these other systems while largely ignoring the cooperative and mutualistic expressions that are also present in our society.

The Culture of Contest

Contests, by definition, result in winners and losers. This is why a century of steady economic growth, mediated by competitive political, legal, and economic systems, has actually increased the gap between the rich and the poor both in our country and around the world (Ackerman, 2000; Fishlow & Parker, 1999; Haseler, 1999; Shapiro & Greenstein, 1999). When virtually every social institution is structured as a contest, those with the most political and economic power inevitably fare better than those without. This is because the political economy of contests tends to privilege those at the top of existing social hierarchies.

The articulation of economic, political, and legal contests into an integrated tripartite formation makes this problem particularly acute. The reasons are simple: The outcomes of political and legal contests are influenced by access to material wealth. Economic contests determine the distribution of wealth within societies. Hence this tripartite system tends to subordinate political and legal decision making to market interests and influences (Karlberg, 2004). Simply put, political and legal competition is expensive, and economic competition determines who has the money to prevail.

This is not to say that competition is inherently problematic in every sphere of social activity. Recreational contests may have some intrinsic value if pursued in the proper spirit. Likewise, in the economic sphere, some kind of market system
that rewards hard work, innovation, and efficiency appears to be desirable. The problem arises, however, when economic, political, and legal contests are all articulated within the tripartite formation described above. In order to avoid extremes of wealth and poverty in the economic arena, competition needs to be carefully regulated. Yet contest models in the political and legal arenas subordinate political and legal regulatory functions to the interests and influences of the economically privileged. Therefore, within this tripartite system, it is virtually impossible for states to regulate the economy in a just and sustainable manner.

Moreover, to be effective, state regulations ultimately need to be complemented by the moral self-regulation of individual economic actors (A. Smith, 1910; 1976). Only by operating in concert can both forms of regulation provide the necessary constraints and incentives needed to maximize the benefits of a free market while curbing its excesses. The tripartite system of contests, however, does little to cultivate moral self-regulation. When virtually all public activity is structured as a series of contests that reward the competitive pursuit of material self-interests, the cultural environment is hardly conducive to moral development and self-regulation. Ubiquitous and indiscriminate competition tends to cultivate self-serving rather than others-serving values. Beyond affecting the distribution of wealth within contemporary societies, these contest models of social organization exert a subtle but profound influence on human consciousness. Social institutions provide the matrix within which human beings learn what it means to be human. When every major social institution is organized according to the principles of competitive individualism, self-serving behaviors begin to appear normal, natural, and inevitable. Thus do our models of social organization reinforce our models of "human nature."

*Human Nature as Self-Serving or Other-Serving?*

Within the prevailing culture of contest, human nature appears to be essentially competitive, individualistic, and self-serving. These assumptions about human nature have deep roots
in Western civilization, reaching back over two thousand years through various Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions (Kehoe, 1992; Ong, 1981; Tannen, 1998). With the dawn of the European "enlightenment," these assumptions became firmly entrenched in Western-liberal theory and practice. As Rose, Lewontin, and Kamin (1987) explain, the contemporary version of this essentially pessimistic view of human nature goes back to the emergence of bourgeois society in the seventeenth century and to Hobbes's view of human existence as bellum omnium contra omnes, a war of all against all, leading to a state of human relations manifesting competitiveness, mutual fear, and the desire for glory. For Hobbes, it followed that the purpose of social organization was merely to regulate these inevitable features of the human condition. And Hobbes's view of the human condition derived from his understanding of human biology; it was biological inevitability that made humans what they were. (p. 5)

This self-interested and aggressive view of human nature was the conventional wisdom within most Western social sciences up until quite recently (e.g., Ardrey, 1966; Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1979; Konner, 1984; Lorenz, 1966; Morris, 1968; Storr, 1968; Tiger & Fox, 1971). In recent decades, however, this view has been rejected by scholars from a wide range of disciplines (e.g., Bandura, 1973; Brocke-Utne, 1989; Kohn, 1990; Lewontin, 1991; Mansbridge, 1990; Mark & Ervin, 1970; Montagu, 1976; 1978; Rose et al., 1987; Ross, 1993). In anthropology, for instance, Howell and Willis (1989) have pointed out:

The great majority of researchers assert that "aggression" is an integral part of human nature; and that aggressive impulses and behaviour have somehow to be directed and controlled for human relations to be sustained over time in a social setting. We wish to propose an alternative approach, challenging the assumption that aggression is an innate human drive. It is undeniably the case that in Western society aggression is regarded as part of human nature. But perhaps this tells us more about Western society than about human nature. We wish to suggest that we cannot assume an a priori aggressive drive in humans. The presence of innate sociality, on the other hand, has much evidence in its favor. Humans are a priori sociable beings; it is their cooperativeness that has enabled them to survive, not their aggressive impulses. (pp. 1-2)

Many other anthropologists concur with this conclusion. As Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin (1977) explain:
Throughout our recent evolutionary history, particularly since the rise of a hunting way of life, there must have been extreme selective pressures in favor of our ability to cooperate as a group. The degree of selective pressure towards cooperation, group awareness, and identification was so strong, and the period over which it operated was so extended, that it can hardly fail to have become embedded to some measure in our genetic makeup. (p. 209)

Of course, this emerging view does not deny the existence of competitive impulses in human nature. Human beings clearly have the developmental potential for both competition and cooperation. Which potential is more fully developed, however, depends on our cultural environment (Seville, 1987), as demonstrated by the fact that different societies vary considerably in their expressions of competition and cooperation (Ross, 1993).

Many economists are also arriving at this conclusion. Rejecting the essentially self-interested and competitive model of human nature that has dominated for centuries, they are beginning to acknowledge the human potential for cooperative, altruistic, and even self-sacrificing behaviour (e.g., Becker, 1976; Collard, 1978; Hammond, 1975; Hollander, 1990; Lunati, 1992; Margolis, 1982; Sugden, 1982; Zamagni, 1995). A growing body of theory and research is demonstrating that the competitive pursuit of self-interests can be a less effective strategy than mutual cooperation, even when measured strictly by indicators of material gain (Akerlof, 1983; Frank, 1988). Hence cooperative behaviors appear to have been selected for in human evolution due to the advantages they confer as rational decision-making strategies (Axelrod, 1984; Becker, 1976; Bergstrom & Stark, 1993; Casti, 1994; Samuelson, 1993; Simon, 1990).

What is troubling, however, is the self-fulfilling nature of assumptions that human beings are essentially selfish and competitive. Studies demonstrate, for instance, that neo-classically trained economists tend to behave in more self-interested ways than non-economists, due in part to their continual exposure to these assumptions (Frank, Gilovich, & Regan, 1993). In standard ultimatum bargaining scenarios, economists tend to be less successful than non-economists because the latter place a higher value on mutualism and cooperation, which tends to be a more successful strategy (Lattimore, 1992). Zamagni (1995) explains:
Our beliefs about human nature help shape human nature itself, in the sense that what we think about ourselves and our possibilities determine what we aspire to become. In this precise sense, the self-interest theory is not morally neutral, contrary to what most economists seem to believe. There is growing evidence that the self-interest paradigm may be self-fulfilling. . . . Subjects come to perceive self-interest as a normative characterization of rational behaviour and come to act accordingly. It is here that the effects of the self-interest theory are most disturbing. (p. xxi)

By naturalizing competitive individualism within our economic, political, and legal arenas, these assumptions regarding human nature cultivate the behaviors they allegedly explain. Those cultivated behaviors then tend to be invoked in order to legitimate contest models of social organization which, in turn, further reinforce the myth that human nature is inherently competitive and self-serving.

Educational Contests

How is this relevant to service-learning? It is relevant because our educational systems, as they are currently structured, tend to reinforce this culture of contest and competition. From elementary school on, we train our students to compete with one another in the classroom, on the playing field, and so forth. By the time students get to university, these competitive values have been deeply internalized in many if not most of them. Hence many students arrive at university with the view that higher education is simply a means to increase their competitive earning power.

Within our universities, we then continue to cultivate the same values by structuring the classroom “as a locus for individualistic competition of students pitted against each other for high places on the grade curve” (Bellah et al., 1991, p. 172). These structures are rationalized by the argument that we need to train students in a manner that gives them an advantage in the competitive labor market they are about to enter. However, this competitive drive becomes so strong in many students that they soon learn to look down on their more socially and politically engaged peers, viewing them as “losers” in the wider socio-economic contest (or “rat race”) that is increasingly mistaken for the meaning and purpose of human life (Loeb, 1994).
There is, however, another way to structure higher education. Universities might just as well serve as a counterbalance to this culture of contest and competition. By the time students reach university they do not need further training in competitive individualism. Rather, they need opportunities to practice selflessness and commitment to the common good. They need opportunities to realize the intrinsic rewards that come from submerging one’s immediate self-interests in the long-term collective interests of the local, national, and global communities they are part of. In short, they need opportunities to internalize the concepts and attitudes of service and mutualistic interdependence. As Bellah et al. (1991) state:

The idea of an education that simply gives individuals the methods and skills they need to get ahead in the world is almost certainly inadequate, even as “job preparation,” in an advanced technical economy, which requires morally and socially sensitive people capable of responsible interaction. It is even more inadequate in preparing citizens for active participation in a complex world. (p. 170)

CULTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES

Efforts to elevate service values in higher education face significant challenges. Cultivating political support for such efforts will not be easy. Fortunately, voices of support do occasionally penetrate educational policy discourse. The challenge, of course, will be to amplify these voices and translate them into actual material support for service-learning pedagogy and curricula. This long-term challenge will require ongoing efforts to educate policy makers about the need to find a better balance between self-serving values and other-serving values in higher education. However, even if these efforts are successful, educational policy and practice can never stray too far from prevailing cultural norms and expectations. Therefore, these efforts will ultimately bear fruit only if a more service-oriented consciousness can also be cultivated on a wider basis, as an alternative to the competitive individualism that currently dominates Western popular consciousness.

This larger project, of course, will be no easy task. It will
require systematic effort on many fronts. It will also require long-term, sustained commitment. Cultural change does not happen overnight. Yet it can happen, and it can be consciously and strategically pursued, as witnessed by the hard-won historical accomplishments of many past social movements. Scholars, public officials, community leaders, and all interested citizens have a role to play in this regard. One of the key roles that scholars will need to play is the role of the engaged public intellectual, occupied in meaningful dialogue with diverse communities outside the academy. In this dialogue, we would do well to continually question the existing culture of contest, the norms of competitive individualism that inform it, and the assumptions regarding human nature that underlie it: Whose interests are being served by this cultural formation? How sustainable is it? Is it an inevitable expression of human nature? Or is it merely a social construction? If the latter, will it remain viable under conditions of increasing social and ecological interdependence? Or has it already become culturally maladaptive and anachronistic?

We would also do well to articulate compelling alternatives. Alternatives visions of public life, and alternative institutional models and practices, can already be found in the writings of many scholars and public intellectuals (e.g., Bellah et al., 1985, 1991; Boulding, 1990; Bush & Folger, 1994; Dahl, 1996; Danesh, 1986; Elias, 2001; Etzioni, 1997; Hitt, 1998; Huddleston, 1989; Kohn, 1992; Laszlo, 1989; Lerche, 1991; Mansbridge, 1980; Mathews, 1994; Menkel-Meadow, 1995; Rutstein, 1999; Tannen, 1998; Thomas, 1993). These examples could certainly be expanded and refined if the intellectual energies of increasing numbers of scholars were applied to the task.

Toward this end, scholars also need to engage the public and draw upon all of the practical knowledge and experience that have accumulated in diverse communities, groups, and professions that have already been experimenting with alternative social practices that are consistent with the values of mutualistic interdependence. What can we learn from the non-partisan electoral systems and consensus-based decision-making models that are springing up in the shadows of a partisan political system that is breeding widespread public cynicism and apathy? What
can we learn from the alternative dispute resolution systems and community-based adjudication models that are springing up in the shadows of a legal adversary system that is frustrating and alienating large segments of the population? And what can we learn from the cooperative economic experiments, profit-sharing business models, and socially responsible investment strategies that are springing up in the shadows of a market system that is aggravating the plight of the majority of the world’s inhabitants while degrading the ecological capital upon which the entire economy ultimately depends?

While engaging the public in a search for alternative social structures and practices, scholars who are committed to elevating service values in higher education will also need to pay attention to the institutional cultures within our universities. Though many universities are beginning to invoke the rhetoric of service-learning, real support for service-learning often lags behind. For instance, some campuses are beginning to create centers for service-learning that provide support through workshops, consultations, community partnership databases, and resource libraries. These are important steps in the right direction. Yet the most accurate reflection of an institution’s values can be seen in its reward systems. Even on campuses that are creating support services, service-learning instruction is seldom explicitly valued where it counts the most: in faculty tenure and promotion processes. Faculty handbooks and unit evaluation plans rarely articulate explicit rewards for service-learning instruction. Yet, without explicit reward structures in place, service-learning will remain a marginal activity on university campuses, as many others have already pointed out (Crabtree, 1999; Kupiec, 1993; Ward, 1998; Weigert, 1998).

This is not to suggest that external rewards are the only ways to motivate faculty to incorporate service-learning into their teaching. Such a suggestion would run counter to the intrinsically motivated service ethic that the above discussion is calling for. However, efforts to transform institutional cultures are most likely to succeed if internal and external motivations are aligned toward the same ends. Many young faculty have begun their careers with idealistic commitments to service-learning and other related
pedagogies, only to learn that institutional reward structures consistently steer them away from those commitments. The logic, again, is simple. As Crabtree points out, "Service-learning courses take more time and energy than regular classroom teaching" (1999, p. 130). Developing and sustaining service-learning curricula thus diverts energy from other, more highly rewarded, institutional duties. Unless reward structures explicitly support service-learning instruction and recognize it as a labor-intensive form of instruction, even the most intrinsically motivated faculty will face a strong disincentive to invest time and energy in it.

Consider the following typical case: A new communication faculty member arrives in a tenure track position, exhausted, after spending the past seven years juggling graduate school, full time employment, and family. His/her two young children have never known this parent to work fewer than 60-70 hours a week. Now that this person has finished graduate school and is in a tenure-track position, he/she hopes to begin working a relatively normal and reasonable work week and establish a strong presence in the lives of the children. The parent has already missed out on much of their early childhood and refuses to miss out on the remainder of it. This is a reasonable expectation.

At the same time, this new faculty member wants a successful career in academia, so he/she has carefully read the relevant tenure and promotion documents in order to chart a course toward successful tenure review. These documents stipulate a relatively heavy teaching load, substantial research and publishing expectations, and a significant expectation of institutional service. It is going to be a challenge to meet even these basic expectations in a normal work week. These tenure and promotion documents do not explicitly reward service-learning instruction. Given that service-learning instruction is labor intensive, the new faculty member can only implement it in one of two ways. First, he/she can start working long hours again and miss out on more of the children's lives. Second, he/she can neglect other teaching, research, or service responsibilities and risk missing out on tenure. Clearly, neither of these options is desirable. The rational choice, no matter how much the new faculty member is personally committed to service-learning, is
to minimize that commitment. This person simply cannot afford the investment of time and energy under the current institutional reward system.

Now, multiply this case by the number of new faculty that arrive every year on campuses with reward structures that fail to explicitly acknowledge service-learning. Then fast forward to the time when those faculty who are successful in their tenure bids begin mentoring and advising the next generation of new faculty. Within the institutional culture that emerges under such conditions, service-learning will never become a core commitment.

What can faculty do in order to begin transforming the institutional culture on their campuses? They can begin by pursuing change at the grassroots, by formulating departmental evaluation plans that explicitly reward service-learning instruction. This will mean easing the burden of some other expectations, such as publishing rates or teaching loads, in order to free up time and energy for service-learning instruction. If we truly value service-learning, something else has to give.

Of course, departmental evaluation plans ultimately need to be accepted and approved by deans and provosts and presidents. But lobbying senior administrators for a cause that runs against the grain of the wider university and public culture is seldom an effective strategy. To maximize the chance of success, faculty need to work within larger scholarly associations, such as the National Communication Association, to produce disciplinary tenure and promotion guidelines that explicitly acknowledge service-learning. Such guidelines would then lend substantial support to individual departments as they try to make a case for service-learning on their own campuses (Diamond, 1994).

In this regard, the National Communication Association claims “a long history of commitment to service-learning” on its website (NCA, 2005a). Indeed, the service-learning section of the NCA website devotes approximately one hundred pages of resources and other materials to service-learning. Yet in all of this online material the NCA never directly addresses the relationship between tenure and promotion reward structures and service-learning. The closest it comes is a brief section, within
its online Service-Learning Toolkit, entitled "Institutionalizing Service-Learning on Your Campus" (NCA, 2005b, pp. 22-24). This section of the Toolkit encourages faculty to influence the discourse on university campuses by trying to get the term service-learning into the mainstream. More specific recommendations include seeking endorsements from administrators and opinion leaders, linking student financial aid to service-learning, providing release time for faculty who want to develop service-learning courses, giving annual awards for outstanding service-learning efforts, starting a clearinghouse for service-learning opportunities in the community, and conducting surveys to track service-learning instruction. However, the document never directly addresses what is arguably the most important determinant of the success of service-learning: changing tenure and promotion guidelines to reward the time and energy it takes to develop and sustain service-learning courses. What is needed is a clear NCA policy statement regarding the highly valued status of service-learning within the discipline, including recommendations regarding its relative weight within tenure and promotion processes. A policy statement such as this would be a valuable resource for those who are currently working at the grassroots, in relative isolation, to change institutional reward structures.

CONCLUSION

Though service-learning means different things to different people, this paper defines it as an experiential pedagogy that cultivates an ethic of service to others rooted in a sense of mutualistic interdependence. This approach is justified by the public service function of publicly funded universities, by growing concerns regarding the condition of contemporary American society, and by an increasing recognition of the need to restore balance in the generation of private capital and social capital. However, significant cultural and institutional obstacles currently inhibit such an approach within higher education. On the cultural level, the prevailing culture of contest presents one such obstacle. On an institutional level, entrenched tenure and promotion structures present another obstacle. In the face of these obstacles, faculty and administrators who are committed
to elevating the service in service-learning can pursue a number of strategies. They can educate policy makers about the need to find a better balance between self-serving values and other-serving values in higher education. They can engage communities outside the academy in rethinking the competitive and individualistic norms and values that shape and constrain educational policies and priorities. Finally, they can work to transform their own institutional cultures by embedding service-learning in their unit evaluation plans and tenure and promotion reward structures. On all of these fronts, effort will need to be systematic, strategic, and sustained.

REFERENCES


Service Learning


Service Learning


