



The Career College Information Source

**SPECIAL ISSUE**

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# **CAREER COLLEGE SERVICE LEARNING**

**Enriching Student Learning, Engagement and Retention**

## Making the Case for Service Learning

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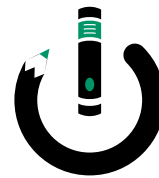
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# solve & evolve

shape the next generation of career education



To celebrate the formation of the Pearson Service Learning Advisory Board, Pearson is the proud sponsor of this edition of the *Career Education Review – Career College Service Learning: Enriching Student Learning, Engagement and Retention*. Here you will find strong cases, submitted by our board members, for service learning in career education. These articles highlight the outstanding work career colleges are doing to give back to their communities and simultaneously enhance their students' learning experiences.

Service learning in career education is not a new concept by any means—private sector and career colleges have long paved the way for community enrichment through academic programs, strengthening their students' connection to their schools while providing them with real-world experience and interaction in their desired fields. Integrating service learning into career education programs is one way we can ensure that students are receiving a well-rounded education.

Students who participate in service learning initiatives gain the skills, confidence and assurance that they can perform out in their field after graduation. These are qualities that cannot be taught solely in the classroom, and we are happy to see so many institutions exploring and implementing service learning into their educational programs. Pearson supports these programs wholeheartedly and, through the vision of our Service Learning Advisory Board, is committed to providing the guidance and thought leadership for continued growth in service learning for years to come.

It's been an interesting year in career college education; yet despite the challenges we all have faced, career education has seen tremendous growth in both the quality of education and gainfully employed students they graduate. Pearson is proud to stand behind these institutions and supports their efforts in providing cost-effective, innovative solutions that will shape the next generation of career education.

To learn more about the Career Service Learning Advisory Board and for more information on Pearson Private Sector and Career Education, visit our Web site [www.pearsonlearningsolutions.com/private-sector/](http://www.pearsonlearningsolutions.com/private-sector/).

Also, be sure to Like Us on Facebook at <http://on.fb.me/vDrC4S>. Here you will find information on events and news from the sector, Pearson's presence at state and national association meetings, and our popular "Solve & Evolve" webinar series.

Join Pearson as we celebrate service learning in career education with the *Career Education Review*.

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# Making the Case for Service Learning

*with Michael Schafer, Vice President of Academic Affairs, Health Strategic Business Unit, Career Education Corporation*

**H**istorically, service learning had been primarily used in not-for-profit private colleges, and it usually ran for a full semester—16 weeks—or in some cases an entire school year. These days we're starting to hear with greater frequency about service learning at career colleges, too. But for those who aren't using the concept, what exactly is it and how does a school go about setting it up? The answers to these questions vary, depending on the school, though most have the same general idea about what it is and what its purpose should be.

For the folks at Career Education Corporation, service learning is, in its simplest form, a teaching method that is part of the curriculum and usually lasts anywhere from five to eight weeks in length; it's about turning ideas into action and giving the students an educational experience that somehow benefits the community at large. And it is different from community service.

"Service learning is actually part of the curriculum. It is part of the creditbearing course. It's not some extracurricular activity they do. It's not something they do in addition to their program. It is part of the program," said Mike Schafer, vice president of academic affairs for health education at the Career Education Group. "Community service is great and we should all be doing it.

We should be members of our community as an institution and push back out into the community. Service learning is about an individual. It's what a student does. It's integrating with the curriculum. It provides the ability for students to reflect on what they've done, and both learning and service are emphasized. Service learning experiences put students into real life settings while they're still in school so they can apply the skills that they're learning. They promote deeper learning. The key part of this is a consequence of the immediacy. The experience allows students to develop

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these ideas of emotional consequences and challenges values, but most of all it creates empathy within a student. What do students get out of it? They provide direct community service, but they learn about the context. So it's still about their educational program.

"I can't speak for everybody, but my experience in this industry has been that students tend to come to us a lot of time with a history of receiving.

They get things. They get things from the government. They get things from their families. But they're not really used to giving back anything. So it's a skill. Giving back is a skill. That's one

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of the key features of service learning," Schafer continued. "Community service is just a volunteer program. It's great. It can be an add-on. You can make community service a requirement. You can say every student has to do 100 hours of

community service before they finish the program, but it doesn't benefit everybody." On the other hand, service learning benefits everyone.

Many people think internships or externships can be considered a service learning activity because students are going out into community places and using the skills a college or university is teaching them, but Schafer said they are not service learning activities, period.

"Their experience of learning is directly related to the skills of the program. If I'm in a medical assistant program and I go on my externship, my focus in doing that is not to serve the community; it's to demonstrate my skills. In externships you're put in the clinical environment; you're interacting with the true professionals in the field to see if you're really going to be able to survive in that environment. It just reinforces the skills and the career choices that students made by going through the educational program," he explained. "In service learning, it's not about the student's career choice necessarily. There's a lot of other applications in service learning that aren't really going to be about if I'm a

medical assistant. I don't have to do a medical assistant service learning activity. The huge connection for the student to understand is how they connect what they're learning in school into what they can do for their community; not what they can do for work, not what they can do for a job, but what they can actually do for their community. And it benefits the community obviously, (as well as the student)."

Let's consider the benefits to the student, and even the school itself.

Service learning helps students see themselves as part of their community, rather than just a bystander in their community. In service learning activities, students are being exposed to a wide range of people, situations and experiences that they otherwise might not have been exposed to. So service learning encourages a significant amount of diversity.

"This one is important to me because it's a quality that's lacking in our public schools. I don't think we've taught Civics in the public schools for probably the last 20 years. There's a lacking element there. This does promote the idea of true citizenship, true belonging in the general community. It gives students wider skills sets, especially soft skills," Schafer said. "The students who come to you and are very, very book smart, the straight-A students that come to school every day, they get the labs correct, they

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show up on time, they do all this stuff and they have zero personality. They have zero social skills. They don't know how to be polite. They're unable to interact with the rest of the community or in a general social setting. They don't know a lot of these things that we may take for granted. Doing this service learning as part of the curriculum forces the students to gain those skills and reinforces the practices.... It's a natural by-product of service learning because you have to interact with the community."

Service learning is good for your curriculum. "At the end of the day, this is something that rounds out the curriculum for your program, whether you're attaching it to individual courses, or whether you're attaching it to entire programs. It makes the program richer, the student's experience richer. It's not just lesson plans: here's what we do day one, here's what we do day two, here's what we do day three. Instead, we're talking about taking all this experience from day one through day three and putting them together and synthesizing and going out into the community with it," he continued.

For example, Schafer said some students went into a food bank that was pretty much being run in a state of disorganization and some confusion, and used the business skills they learned in class to improve the food bank operation, which, in turn, improved the community. He also told of a service learning program where practical nursing students went to their local Veterans Administration office, and, as people were coming home from the war with significant injuries and disabilities and needed to adapt, the students came in and talked about how the vets would be mobile again, what they were going to do to become mobile again and what the proper way to do that was.

"Again, they're taking their skills they learned in their program and they're giving back to their community and they're creating that personal connection," said Schafer. "It exposed them to a group of people they otherwise would not have interacted with.

"This is was one of my favorites. One of the things that people ask is, 'How do I do this if I've got all these people in my program.' This particular school had about 725 medical assistants in the program. We were trying to crack this nut on how we actually do service learning in five-week terms, how we teach and still be able to affect every single member of the Medical Assistant program, and, while doing that, ensuring that what they are doing was a consistent experience. About two weeks before the events—and this took place over a week—the faculty members got together with the students and broke them into groups and said, 'Your group is pancreatic cancer; your group is lung cancer; your group is breast cancer.' They made the students go out and do all the research (on their topic), then boil it down to an informational packet. We obviously had it vetted to make sure that all the information was correct. They created and printed their pamphlet. They got the little bands for each of the different colors of cancer that were out there. We took up three kiosks in one of the local malls. At each of the kiosks, four or five students would work it. Throughout the day they provided information to the people in the mall regarding cancer awareness," Schafer explained. "It was a really powerful experience, but it served all 700-plus students in the course of a week. It was a minimal investment on the school's part and it was a huge return on the student's part, and, from the community, it was extremely well received. Afterwards

the mall owners reached out to us and expressed the desire for us to come back as quickly as possible, perhaps on a monthly basis. That was not going to happen, but it can be done. It really can serve huge groups of students. It doesn't have to be a one-on-one activity. It can be a large group of people over a span of time."

Service learning gives students the opportunity to interact with disadvantaged groups that in some cases may be economically, socially or physically

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disadvantaged. But some of them are going to be like the student and some of them are not going to be. "They get a chance to work with all kinds of disadvantaged people. As a result, students learn empathy for their

fellow man and their particular situations. And it increases diversity if you let any student in any program be themselves," said Schafer.

"Just watch the social dynamics even within your own institutions. Students tend to group together. They share some common interest out there and then they move together through a program and they become these little cliques, so by the end of the 9 months or 12 months or 24 months, you have tiny groups of students and they only talk to each other and nobody else. They don't interact with anybody," said Schafer. "Put them in service learning and they don't have a choice. They have to interact with other folks. It does kind of speak to that diversity idea that you can't teach people to be diversity conscious, but you can certainly expose them to activities that will help them along that road."

"We're not really teaching empathy through service learning; we're exposing them to situations and environments where empathy is a natural by-product. Then they need to reflect on what they actually learned. This is a key element and they'll spend actually quite a bit of time on it," Schafer said. "It does make students sit back and not worry about the group mentality because now they think about how they feel about service learning. It's not 'What do my peers think about me talking to the disabled veteran and assisting him on how he's going to get through his activities and daily life?' Now they have to think about themselves."

Service learning opens doors to internships and externships, which ultimately leads to other opportunities. Schafer recalled a school in Indianapolis that couldn't get into the major health provider in the area for externship opportunities.

"But they were more than willing for us to perform service learning activities at their site. After we had our service learning activities at their site, they changed their mind. So, you can improve the relationships between the internships and externships," he said. "Then you start to get these linkages. A community food bank, for example, is supported by other individuals, organizations and businesses in the area. You network with these people and these people and these people, and suddenly you're starting to create this web of interaction within your community."

One big question many schools face in developing a service learning program is how to assess the students. Do you do it on a points system? Do you do it by the number of hours spent? How do you grade the interactivity? If I have an interaction with a disabled veteran, how do I grade that? Do I give them

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an A? What's an F going to equal? How do you actually grade a service learning activity?

"All you're really trying to establish is that the student can make that link between their education and their community and then be able to bring that back to somebody else and say 'This is why I provided value,'" said Schafer, adding that grades should never be given. Everybody wins; everybody passes. Nobody fails. "Trying to assign a letter grade to this is not the point. The outcome is very subjective in going back to the definition of service learning. Why are we doing this? How does it integrate? Those are all very subjective measurements."

The most commonly used form of assessment in service learning activities is a student reflection essay. The student goes out to do a service learning activity of some sort; they then come back and have to write a reflection essay of what that service learning activity meant to them and how it was beneficial. Schafer said he uses three different elements in his reflection essay requirements, none of which include grading students on spelling or grammar either.

"(Grading on spelling and grammar) is not the point of the reflection essay, and it's not the point of service learning. But there's some fundamental elements for the service learning reflection essay that I developed. It has to have the student name. It's got to say what program they're in. It's got to have an identifier for the activity, the date and the duration of what they did. Then the student has to answer in a minimum of 250 words, three questions. One, how does the service learning activity relate to my course and my program? Two, how has the community benefited from this activity? Three, how can I bring my experiences from this activity

back into the classroom," Schafer said. "Two hundred and fifty words or more, but at least 250 words. It has to be thoughtful and it has to be a true reflection and not just 'Service learning was fun,' or 'I really liked this.' They have to answer those three questions. That's the only part that I'll let the faculty members grade.

Other than that, everybody gets an A on this activity. Those three questions are the core of what wraps around service learning. The reflection should be completed at the end, though it's still part of the course."

Making the transition from realizing the benefits and wanting to set up a service learning program, to actually developing and implementing one can be tricky, but it doesn't have to be. First, it has to be part of your school's culture. Campuses have to demonstrate leadership. People need to buy into this.

"If you take on this idea that service learning is going to be part of your institutional mission, then it's not optional. It's not optional for the student, and it's not optional for anybody on the campus. It has to become part of the culture; you can't opt out of it. You can't expect behavior from students that you're not willing to demonstrate yourselves," said Schafer. "So if you've got the school president or the program director who order the students to go out and do their service learning, go out and do it, and they sit in their office, that's not working for me. They have to model the behavior. Students have to see that. No matter what form of our education we're in, students rise to the expectations of their model. So you've got to model this behavior."

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It is also important to not lower the expectation just because it's hard. "If I'm going to give 10 percent of a grade to a service learning activity, it better have some rigor behind it. It needs to be well thought-out. It needs to be executed well. It needs to be documented well. In my case, it needs to be reflected upon well. It has the rigor as if I was teaching a student how to draw blood. It's still kind of the same steps going on there. I need

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to be able to say this is not just fun and games time, this is a serious activity," Schafer noted. "Going out and helping your community as part of your educational program is serious stuff. It's probably

more serious than a lot of things they do in school. It's a whole lot more serious than taking a Sociology class. It's maybe not quite as important as learning how to do blood pressures for an MA, but it's certainly more important than a Sociology class. So it's got to have that rigor to it."

Other by-products of service learning that benefit students, the institution and the community as a whole include:

- A community that is enhanced because of the work being done;
- Students having the ability to apply their learned skills in a real-life, practical setting;
- It opens doors to externships and internships;
- At the same time, students are building networking opportunities

that may help them get placed in the future;

- Relationships are built between the school and other organizations in the community, in many cases allowing these organizations to feel like partners with the school. Making those partnerships in the communities makes you part of the solution to problems and concerns in the community and the people who they come to when they want to address a community need;
  - Students learn to give back in an empathetic way. They take the skills they've learned, bring them back to their community and feel good about what they're doing. They're learning to give rather than just take;
  - Retention is improved when students realize that what they are doing in the community makes a difference and they feel good about it. "Creating that sense of belonging for students makes it more important for them to come to school tomorrow than to stay at home and watch TV." So retention is a natural by-product;
  - New enrollments may result from service learning because existing or past students have had a good experience with it. "Students who have gone through all this are going to be better ambassadors for your schools... We talk about PDLs and all that stuff, but the reality is there's always going to be that cycle that your graduates are your best representatives in the community and probably your best source of new students," said Schafer.
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Sanford-Brown – Garden City Medical Assistant students held the Healthy Heart event at Roosevelt Field Shopping Mall in Garden City. As a service learning activity, it allowed the students to provide a meaningful service to the community, while utilizing their clinical skills in a non-simulated setting. The Medical Assistant students provided free blood pressure checks and heart related information to over 150 shoppers throughout the course of the day. During the visit, guests were also given tips for a healthy heart and resources where they could find more information about the blood pressure's effect on overall health. The event was so well received that the mall management has given the Garden City campus the opportunity to offer this event on a continuing basis.

- An improved image and reputation for the school. Career colleges have taken a big hit in the media in recent years and have been made to look like thieves and liars, said Schafer. Service learning projects demonstrate the opposite. “Your reputation can go away overnight (by bad press). But if you spent a lot of time being committed and demonstrated consistently that you’re part of the community, when those stories come out they’re going to say, ‘That must have been one person. That’s not what that school is like. That school is a good school. They do all these things. Service learning is part of their activities. I’m going to give them the benefit of the doubt on this one,’” Schafer said.

Finally, to the issue of accreditation, Schafer has some very definite, but simple ideas about how to explain to

your state, your accreditors, or the Department of Education why service learning should be counted as part of the educational program and not thought of as just some volunteer activity.

“These were the three key areas that I think really won the day for me in terms of having those discussions: One, it increases student personal growth; two, it enhances their social maturity; and three, it expands their intellectual development,” he said. “Those are the key objectives of service learning that I presented to the accreditors and they were very, very happy with that idea.”

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