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Service-Learning: A Tool to Develop Employment Competencies for College Students

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College students will face a workplace transformed even from the one that existed five years ago. Public and private organizations presently require employees to possess highly developed core competencies. This shift in expectations, exacerbated by high unemployment among recent college graduates, has made accountability a hot issue for higher education. Colleges have begun to integrate experiential approaches into the curriculum to impart work competencies. Internships, the classic form of experiential education, cannot develop all the required skills and knowledge, especially if students do not take part in a reflection activity. Service-learning, a more recent approach to experiential education, is high impact because it links community service to academic goals and facilitates application and testing of academics in a new professional situation. The author discusses how the intrinsic characteristics of service-learning facilitate the acquisition of workplace competencies by exploring its application in two community college paralegal courses.

Introduction

Students currently in college will be facing a workplace transformed even from the one that existed five years ago. Public and private organizations of all sizes are requiring that employees possess highly developed core competencies to ensure their viability in an economy that has seen an upsurge in technology, the onset of the mass retirement of seasoned

workers, and increased global competition (Aldas, Crispo, Johnson, & Price, 2010; Hanneman & Gardner, 2010).

This confluence of economic factors has resulted in heightened employer expectations for entry-level employees. Required competencies include the ability to produce results and assimilate into the culture of the organization rapidly, coupled with the capacity to cross disciplines and cultures easily (Aldas et al., 2010; Hanneman & Gardner, 2010). These competencies, required at a minimal level in the 1990s, now are required at an “*über* level” (Hanneman & Gardner, 2010, p. 2). Contemporaneously, a fast-growing trend has been the demand for accountability in education from politicians and the public alike (Kress, Zechmahn, & Schmitt, 2011).

This intensification of employer expectations, exacerbated by the high unemployment rate for newly graduated college students, has ignited this issue into a heated issue for colleges. Experiential education has surfaced as the ideal academic practice to impart many of the required competencies, including knowledge and experience in a particular field and organizational socialization (Eyler, 2009). Some colleges have begun to overhaul their entire curriculum with career development at the core, employing varied modalities of collaborative learning and experiential education (Aldas et al., 2010; Masterson, 2010). Although internships are the classic model of experiential education, they cannot sufficiently support students to develop all workplace competencies at the elevated level currently mandated (Hanneman & Gardner, 2010; Internships.com, 2010).

Service-learning, a more recent approach to experiential education, links academics to community service and requires a reflective segment in any appropriate media. Service-learning complements the internship because many of its inherent characteristics mirror the ones that “high-impact” internships possess, including reflecting, linking experience to academic goals, and facilitating application and testing of academics in a new situation. Unfortunately, the academy has been slow in its adoption, erroneously claiming that this “volunteer” work belongs as an extracurricular activity (Harkavy & Hartley, 2010).

Most studies of service-learning focus on the moral and civic values that service imparts, whereas others have demonstrated an increase in academic and cognitive skills (Droge & Murphy, 1999; Elwell & Bean, 2001; Ives & Obenchain, 2006). Scant attention, however, has been paid to service-learning’s career-enhancing benefits (Eyler & Giles, 1999). This article discusses how the intrinsic characteristics of service-learning experiences are crucial to preparing students for workplace competencies, some of which internships cannot provide because of their lack of availability due to government regulation. This article examines the service-learning

components of two community college courses, Immigration Law and Family Law, in order to show that service-learning can develop three of the workplace competencies required by employers, thereby adding that competitive edge for college graduates: a ready ability to convert college-acquired knowledge to the workplace; to grasp the realities of the workplace; and to make the transformation to global citizens.

The Legal World

The world of private law firms represents a conservative, status-conscious environment where hiring is closed to people outside the mainstream (Levin, 2009). For attorneys, statistics reveal that midsize and large law firms commonly do not hire women and minorities and, if hired, do not promote them to partner (see Fuchs Epstein, 2001). The paralegal or legal assistant position emerged in the 1960s as an adjunct to the attorney. The early paralegals were legal secretaries who obtained training on the job in more legal-related tasks (McCabe, 2007). They were largely female. Females continue to predominate the field owing to the subordinate nature of the position in a male-dominated profession and because of the initial group of paralegals. The typical paralegal hired by elite law firms possesses a bachelor's degree, often from an Ivy League institution, and uses the position as a stepping-stone to graduate or law school. Although this trend has been changing slowly, McCabe (2007) wrote that large law firms generally require paralegals to have a bachelor's degree or post-baccalaureate certificate in paralegal studies. She also noted that, at the time, an increasing number of paralegals across the board possessed either a bachelor's or a master's degree. Our students receive a two-year associate's degree upon graduation and view the paralegal profession as their career goal, another limitation to their employability (see <http://www.hostos.cuny.edu/oaa/bss/paralegaldes.htm>).

Eugenio María de Hostos Community College

The courses that are the focus of this examination represent two of the specialty law courses in the public-interest paralegal studies at Eugenio María de Hostos Community College (Hostos). Hostos is unique because of its transitional bilingual education program and its student population, which is the smallest and most economically disadvantaged in the City University of New York system (CUNY) (Hirsch & DeLuca, 2003). CUNY is the country's leading urban public university and consists of 23 colleges and institutions in the five boroughs of New York City.

Hostos was established in 1968 in the South Bronx to meet the higher educational needs of the then-Puerto Rican community and similarly positioned community members who had previously been excluded from higher education (Hostos Community College [hereafter, HCC], n.d.). The majority of Hostos students live in the neighborhoods surrounding the South Bronx campus, which neighborhoods remain largely Hispanic.

The Puerto Rican residents have moved out of the neighborhood through upward mobility and have since been replaced by immigrants from the Dominican Republic. Poverty has persisted. Economically and educationally, Latinos have fallen behind all other ethnic and racial groups. American-born children of Latino immigrants drop out of high school at a rate of 9%, a rate higher than any other group, and only 28% of college-age Latinos attend college (Stoeltje, 2011). The main reason for this rate, cited by the children in Latino families, is the need to add to family finances. Families remain poor because the immigrant parents' low literacy rates have impeded their ability to learn English. Lacking proficient English skills, the parents are able to secure only menial, low-paying employment (Berger, 2010; Lys, 2009). An additional reason for high dropout rates is the high rate of motherhood among young Latino girls (Stoeltje, 2011).

This financial handicap is likely to continue for the near future, because Latinos' household wealth declined by 66% during the recent recession, again a rate higher than any for other ethnic or racial group in the United States (Tavernise, 2011). This lack of economic power has led to a marginalization of Latino students, especially females, whose identity is subservient in Latino culture. A recent law review article contends that this marginalization is perpetuated by the national tendency to view of Latinos as illegal immigrants and a threat to national security (Vazquez, 2011). This marginalization has resulted in a crisis of self-esteem and self-efficacy for Latinos.

The breakdown of the 6,499 students enrolled at Hostos in fall 2010 includes the following: 3,701 were Hispanic; 1,441 were African American; 68.3% were female; 4,553 were U.S. citizens; 1,819 were noncitizens; 38.4% possessed a high school diploma and 14.9% had a G.E.D.; and 4,212 resided in the Bronx, living at or just above the poverty level (see HCC, n.d.).

The Hostos Paralegal Program

The founders of the program established the paralegal studies with full understanding of the obstacles that the Hostos students, who are well outside of the mainstream, would face. The paralegal program was intentionally designed with a public-interest curriculum, whose mission is

to provide students with the legal assistant skills to serve the underrepresented and disadvantaged communities of New York City (see HCC, 2011).

The potential employers for this program are not mainstream corporations or traditional law firms. These smaller employers—such as solo practitioners, small law firms, governments, not-for-profit organizations, and legal defense organizations—provide legal services to a low-income population in the areas of family, immigration, housing, criminal, and tort law, and they embrace the characteristics of a diverse student population. The program's placement objective is to provide these employers with the type of paralegal that best supports their respective caseloads and clients. According to Seron (1996), male and female solo and small-firm attorneys place high importance on empathetic communications with clients. These legal offices seek paralegals that mirror the client base of their respective organizations, because paralegals interface and discuss sensitive issues with the client more frequently than the attorney does. Their clients feel comfortable with someone with whom they can identify, whether because of a shared nationality or native language. Additionally, attorneys working at small firms believe that clients value cases being handled quickly and inexpensively. The paralegal will meet with the client often to gather biographic information and documents and complete paperwork, whereas the attorney will conduct the transaction or the litigation (Seron, 1996). This arrangement is effective, because the paralegal can be billed out at a less expensive rate while the client's communication needs are satisfied.

The public-interest nature of the paralegal program expands the employment opportunities for our students. Interestingly, public-interest law does not generally appeal to most law students in a traditional student body. When the student demographics are more diverse, however, public service becomes a career preference (Wilkins, Dinovitzer, & Batra, 2007). Studies as well as our own experience confirm that discrimination and other injustices, whether experienced by the student or through family or friends, can spark interest in working within a student's ethnic or immigrant communities to effect change (Fuchs Epstein & Winston, 2010; Taylor & Trepanier-Street, 2007).

The Paralegal Studies program, launched in 1992, joined a unit with an established public administration program that prepares students to work in government or social service settings. Students in both programs receive a two-year associate of applied science degree, and the law courses are among the group of requirements that students can choose to satisfy both majors. The paralegal major is still a relatively small program; as such, public administration students comprise more than half of the law classes.

The program's curriculum, as it was initially developed, required stu-

dents to take a survey course and an advanced course in one public-interest law specialty, such as immigration, family, or criminal law. The specialties represent areas in which the minority and immigrant populations sorely need legal services. The survey course provides a foundation of basic substantive law, and the advanced course includes more sophisticated topics and procedural law, including preparation of documents. The program curriculum was later modified to require three survey courses in different specialty areas to afford the students a broader exposure to the law, which, in turn, expands their placement potential (see HCC, 2007).

Curriculum and Service-Learning Components

The Immigration Law Curriculum

Immigration Law, the survey course in U.S. immigration and nationality law, covers administration of the immigration laws; non-immigrant and immigrant visas and processes to obtain visas, status, and extensions; grounds of excludability and deportability; waivers and the removal procedure; and citizenship, including the naturalization process.

Over the three spring semesters from 2008-2010, my immigration law classes participated in the joint CUNY Citizenship Now!–*Daily News* Call-In, which occurs each spring at the *Daily News* building in Manhattan. CUNY Citizenship Now! provides free, high-quality immigration law services through centers on CUNY campuses in New York City and coordinates community, educational, and volunteer initiatives to help New York City's immigrant population (see "Citizenship Now: About Us", 2011). In total, 40 public administration and paralegal students have participated in this experience. During one week in April, individuals from the New York tri-state area telephone a toll-free number to receive free information about naturalization and other immigration procedures. Students, paralegals, and volunteers who have received training from CUNY Citizenship Now! staff the telephones. Experienced attorneys, available to assist with the wave of a hand, along with a comprehensive handbook, provide on-site support. Because many of my students cannot attend the full-day training offered by CUNY Citizenship Now!, I provide them with three class lessons on citizenship and naturalization by the time they participate in their service-learning experience. Because the call-in is restricted to one week, I afford absent students the opportunity to participate in an American Immigration Lawyers Association's free citizenship clinic, where they assist permanent residents in completing the Form N-400 for naturalization. I train the students to complete these documents, and they receive support from an experienced paralegal or volunteer at their respective workspace.

The Family Law Curriculum

The survey course in Family Law focuses on New York state (NYS) law. It explores the concepts involved in domestic relations laws and the process of litigation, including family court proceedings concerning families and children, such as child support, paternity, child protective proceedings, or Supreme Court matrimonial actions, such as divorce.

I have sought service-learning experiences in the family law area for many years and have made numerous inquiries in my quest to find an appropriate community site. Any mismatch of goals and actual experience, for either the student or the community group, can result in disaster (Parilla & Hesser, 1998). I envisioned an experience in which students would be engaged in the provision of direct representation of or interaction with low-income individuals, would be capable of performing the task with some training and support where needed, and would experience the application of theory and concepts of domestic relations law. Studies of law school clinics, in which law students represent disadvantaged people in the community, have found that students get the most educational benefit out of client representation cases in which the students' autonomy is maximized (Chavkin, 1998; Critchlow, 1990).

The service-learning component for Family Law occurred one time only during the fall 2010 semester, and 15 students participated. After a bruising year of close to 600 layoffs, the NYS Unified Court System needed assistance from my students in Family Court (Wiessner, 2011). Students had the opportunity to work in diverse areas of NYS Family Court and at the venue closest to their respective homes. Some students performed internship-type duties, such as assisting court personnel in the processing and mailing of orders of protection, custody, visitation, guardianship, and child support; assisting persons in need of supervision orders and warrants; and inputting information into the computer. However, they all performed direct service. This included giving instructions to petitioners about the dates and documentation needed for court appearances and assisting in the Do-It-Yourself area by helping petitioners draft child-support modifications and paternity petitions using a computer program and by handling assorted inquiries.

My primary motivations for incorporating service-learning into the curriculum were both academic and practical. Academically, procedure plays a pivotal role in immigration law, just as it does in family law litigation. Knowledge of practice and actual form preparation is as essential as knowledge of the substantive areas in both these fields of law. For paralegals—whose job it is to meet with the clients, assist in form preparation and process, and monitor cases—neglecting the application of the

law would leave students' understanding of immigration and family law incomplete. Studies have shown that students learn a skill best by having the primary responsibility for employing that skill to accomplish a task that they can see from start to finish (Kruse, 2002).

On a practical level, out of financial necessity, most Hostos students need to be employed part-time or full-time while they are in school and immediately upon graduation. Students often have dependent families or children and do not have the luxury of deferring gainful employment once they are of age to work. My hope was that this service-learning experience would provide enough skills that the students could move smoothly into a position. Finally, I wanted to equalize the benefits of the class for both majors. The paralegal program requires the completion of two practicum courses totaling 240 hours of internship in any legal services, community-based organization, or governmental setting. Public administration students have no required internship course.

New Expectations

The confluence of various economic factors has led employers to require an exceptionally high level of preparedness for entry-level employees. These factors are threefold. One is the rapid advancement of technology, which has led to the elimination of entire classes of routine and task-specific positions. The replacement positions require advanced skills for which organizations will not train new employees. The second is the globalization of the world through the Internet and other media and the competition that the United States faces from well-educated workers in other countries and from lower costs for offshore manufacturing and labor. Finally, there is an imminent knowledge shortage, which will occur when the Baby Boomer generation retires in the near future. This void of highly skilled personnel has been stalled somewhat by an economic downturn, forcing retirement-age workers to continue working (Nyce & Wyatt, 2007).

The February 2010 *Research Brief* from the Collegiate Employment Research Institute enumerated the results of an exhaustive study of employer position announcements from 2003 to 2009 across college majors, geography, size, and industry (Hanneman & Gardner, 2010). The authors found that the competencies that employers required for entry-level employees have been consistent since the 1990s, except that workers were expected to possess these skills at an extraordinarily high level. Even though a new employee may bring an array of skills into the workplace, Hanneman and Gardner's (2010) research during this period showed that success in this first position was predicated on a few key skills: quickly converting

college-acquired learning to the workplace; writing effectively; working effectively in a team; acquiring new knowledge as quickly as possible to carry out job functions; being able to grasp the realities of the workplace (how the organization explicitly and implicitly operates, often referred to as organizational socialization); and demonstrating initiative.

Contemporaneously, a significant trend has evolved in education. Politicians and the public hold public schools accountable for student learning. This consequence of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act has reverberated through the ranks of higher education. Elevated expectations for entry-level employees paired with the abysmal national unemployment rate for college graduates ages 20 to 24 (8.7% in 2010, the highest annual rate on record) have driven up demand for the accountability of colleges (Jacoby & Dean, 2010). High scores on standardized tests are the desirable outcome for primary and secondary school students; the standard for postsecondary education is more ill-defined. Given the soaring price of tuition, students and parents have interpreted success as a college's ability to prepare students for post-college employment (Esposito, 2010; Labi, 2010).

In response, some colleges have overhauled their curricula by employing varying modalities of experiential learning. Wake Forest University, for example, adopted a university-wide initiative that emphasizes vocational and character development. A major strategy of the initiative is integration of student career development into the educational experience. During first-year orientation, students begin their personal exploration of interests and passions and learn how to translate them into a job. This approach captures students' attention early in their academic career, enabling them to continue preparing throughout their studies (Masterson, 2010).

Wagner College in Staten Island, New York, adopted a plan to prepare students for their prospective careers and to enhance their ability to discover their life's work. The college's plan is based on research of successful academic interventions combined with an acknowledgment of economic realities. Academic practices aimed at connecting academic learning with career skills development are integrated into the curriculum of each of the four years of college in an order that reflects a student's own journey of career exploration. The first year begins with career examination; then cross-disciplinary investigation is facilitated; finally, a capstone course encourages reflection and skills preparation (Aldas et al., 2010).

Experiential Education

It is ironic that this philosophy of education, touted as a current reform, has its roots in the early 1900s. John Dewey (1938) pioneered the idea that

the only true education emanates from experience. Experiential education takes many forms: community service, internship/practicum, cooperative education, undergraduate research, study abroad, and service-learning (Freeland, 2009).

Internships

Internships provide students with an opportunity to work in a professional setting for a substantial period from one semester to one summer or even one year. Universally accepted in the academy as the pinnacle of experiential education, the benefits of serving an internship for a future career have been validated by numerous studies and surveys (Nance-Nash, 2007). During the last 15 years, demand for résumé-enhancing internships has risen dramatically, even trickling down to the high school generation applying to college (see *Internships.com*, 2010). Interns work for an organization for an extended period and interact across levels of employees. The ability to understand how a workplace operates is at the heart of an internship and is enhanced by this repeated long-term exposure to different situations and personnel (Hanneman & Gardner, 2011). Hence, internships are ideal for developing the important workplace competency of organizational socialization. Only when an internship is crafted as a high-impact practice, however, can it help students develop many of the other required competencies. Interestingly, most of these high-impact characteristics borrow from the innate features of service-learning.

It would be prudent, therefore, for colleges to diversify the offerings of experiential education and to include service-learning as an essential modality. One experiential education mode may not be sufficient for all types of students to develop vital skills at a sufficiently high level to prepare them successfully for the rigors of the current workplace.

The Association of American College and Universities (AAC&U) corroborates this need for diversification. Their studies have resulted in the identification of certain academic practices as being “high impact”—that is, they lead to student engagement and success. These academic practices include internships, service-learning, collaborative learning, and increased opportunities for writing, among others. The AAC&U has found, however, that academic practice must meet certain criteria before it will be considered high impact and will provide added value to a student’s success. For internships to facilitate the development of the criteria required for entry-level employees, they must meet the following six criteria: require great effort, provide students with feedback, help students engage across differences, facilitate application and testing of academics

in a new situation, help students build substantive relationships, and provide opportunities for reflection. Without these key characteristics, the internship will not be fully beneficial to students' career preparation (O'Neill, 2010).

Lack of revenue and an abundance of unemployed college-educated workers willing to accept internship wages have resulted in diminished prospects for paid internships. Unpaid internships, in turn, have been nearly eliminated by a governmental effort to protect students from exploitation as unpaid interns. Department of Labor regulations mandate that employers not profit from the work of interns. An added obstacle for unpaid internships is that they must comply with six legal criteria in the new federal guidelines or they will be considered invalid (Stout, 2010).

Service-Learning

Service-learning is a modality of experiential education developed in the 1970s. Its distinguishing qualities are twofold. Service-learning experiences link academic projects or goals with service to the community, thus meeting the needs of the community, and they require that students engage in continuous, structured reflection (Realign, 2007). This two-way street is at service-learning's core, according to Jacoby (1996). The hyphen in service-learning is the equivalent of an equal sign, indicating that both the service and the learning should be given equal weight (Jacoby, 1996). Part of the current attraction for students is that it builds upon this generation's desire to volunteer, although pure volunteerism lacks the academic component inherent in service-learning (O'Connor, 2006).

The realities of the privations existent in poor, minority, and immigrant communities shape the service-learning experience (Prentice, 2007). Services in the public sector are sorely needed, and, as a result, students are afforded the latitude by the community agencies to interact with community members, giving direct service on a transactional or short-term basis. In contrast, during an internship, students are not afforded this interaction and, more likely, will observe a workplace and assist an experienced worker (Eyler, 2009).

Service-learning continues to struggle to find firm traction in academy, however, especially at four-year colleges and research universities. Many faculty and administrators are suspicious that this pedagogy diverts time and resources from the essential skills of research and teaching, and that it dilutes the academic rigor of a course (Elwell & Bean, 2001). In fact, there must be enormous faculty buy-in and enthusiasm for the service-learning mission, because courses must be designed carefully to match the aca-

demic topic, concept, or goal with the community service. In addition, administrative tasks associated with the community connection abound (Eyler, 2002; Jay, 2008).

Student Reflections

Surveys and Reflective Essays

Students in the three Immigration Law classes that participated in the citizenship activities and the one Family Law class that gave assistance to petitioners and personnel at Family Court completed a survey and wrote an essay reflecting on their respective experiences. The majority of students responded to the survey and wrote their essays shortly after their experience had ended and before the end of the semester. Approximately four other students completed both tools during the semester following the course. Approval for the project was obtained from the Hostos Community College (CUNY) Human Research Protection Program.

Essay Prompt and Survey

The reflective essay prompt was, "Think about your service-learning experience, and describe the experience in at least 10 sentences." The survey included the following seven questions:

1. Describe your service-learning experience.
2. What service did you perform for this class? Where did you perform it?
3. Did you enjoy the experience? Explain your favorite parts.
4. Did you feel properly trained? Explain your answer.
5. How did it feel to help the community?
6. Do you feel that the service is helping you understand family court proceedings for this class (Family Law)? Or did you feel that the service helped you in your exam on citizenship (Immigration Law)?
7. Has this experience influenced your choice of a future career in any way? Explain.

Workplace Competencies Developed by Service-Learning

A combination of participant observation, student reflective essays, and surveys provided evidence of three required workplace competencies: (1) the ability to convert college-acquired knowledge to the workplace; (2) grasping the realities of the workplace; and (3) the development of global citizenship.

Competency #1: The Ability to Convert College-Acquired Knowledge to the Workplace

Background. The inability of entry-level employees to easily access and apply knowledge they learned in college is a problem often reported by employers. Research by Eyler and Giles (1999) and Humphreys (2005) found that this lack of connection stems from the artificial division of knowledge into distinct disciplines in college courses. The superficiality of knowledge attained by students, they found, stems from a lack of student engagement in the material. Based upon my students' experiences, however, I have found that service-learning develops the career competency of converting knowledge to the workplace through two of its distinctive characteristics: direct service provision to community members and reflection.

- **Direct service.** Janet Eyler (2002; 2009), a renowned education scholar in the areas of internships and service-learning, found that knowledge that is deep, nuanced, and relevant is the type most readily converted to the workplace. Eyler found that knowledge obtained through practical real-life situations has more relevance to students than purely textbook material does. Furthermore, she found that this type of information can be more easily retrieved from memory, because it is not simply isolated facts. The service activity is the virtual text that students can connect to the course content and draw upon in the future. Thus, it is the *service* in service-learning, the interaction with a community member or members, that deepens students' knowledge and allows for easy transfer to the job.
- **Reflection.** The second essential element of service-learning, reflection, also produces deeper knowledge. Bringle and Hatcher (1996) and Kinsley (1994) have found that reflection during the performance of

community service is an essential ingredient of the service-learning modality. It provides the vehicle through which students can utilize the experience to broaden their appreciation of the discipline and deepen their knowledge of the course content and understanding of societal issues. Reflection appears to be most effective while students are involved in the event or shortly thereafter. Joseph Raelin (2007), an international scholar in the area of work-based learning and collaborative leadership development, found that this proximity in time allows students to grasp a number of components: how their interaction with their community brings skills into use, which classroom knowledge was in actuality used, and how they are learning. Moreover, once students master this habit of reflection, they possess a method to help them with both their current studies and future problem solving (Eyler, 2002).

Background of student responses. To assess students' understanding of the material presented in family law classes, I required assignments and projects that involved a variety of family law matters. The service-learning was too varied to utilize an examination on particular material. In Immigration Law, however, because the naturalization procedure to become a citizen was the singular focus of the service-learning, I used an examination to test students' knowledge.

Student responses. The survey questions asked for students' perception of whether their performance on class assessments was aided by the service-learning. The first survey question was, "Do you feel that the service is helping you understand family court proceedings for this class? Explain." The following student responses illustrate that the students perceived they had developed a deeper understanding of the material taught in class through service-learning:

Statues [sic], obligations, and information are much easier to understand when your [sic] working hands on experience.

I used to work for a family law lawyer and I know some of the basics, but by having the opportunity to work in the court and see their side of the work, it increased my knowledge.

The students in the Immigration Law class responded to a similar survey question concerning their citizenship examination: "Do you feel that service helped you in your exam on citizenship?" The following

student responses show overwhelmingly that the students believed that the service had a direct benefit for the exam.

It really brought together how what you learn in the classroom is very applicable in the field.

I feel that the service helped me on my exam because what I learned in my class, I practice [sic] with the people who were asking. It was a wonderful experience.

You learn better when you put in practice what you learn in class.

The service helped me with my last exam because there were things that I was able to understand and learn only after handling the callers and from the attorneys there.

Applying my knowledge about immigration helped me understand better what I was learning and to know better what I understood.

The second survey question was, “Did you enjoy your service? Explain your favorite parts.” The following typical response from a student in the Family Law class validates that the students perceived they had developed increased familiarity with the law:

My favorite part is when I call the Plaintiff and gave them instructions and explain [sic] to them what each paperwork stands for and when [the date] they come back to court and [the] papers they need to bring with them.

The following typical response from an Immigration Law student echoes students’ belief that they had acquired greater knowledge from service:

It was a great experience for me as immigrant in this country to help others getting their paper done to be a citizen of the country. Before taking this class, I didn’t know anything about legalization or even naturalization; however, due to the hard work and dedication of the professor, I have learn [sic] more than I expected about law and cases. This trip to the *Daily News* was a wonderful and unforgettable experience for me, because I had the chance to help many people and had the blessings of many of them.

Competency # 2: Grasping the Realities of the Workplace

Background. Studies have shown that as a result of providing direct service to community members, students demonstrate higher self-esteem

(Taylor & Trepanier-Street, 2007). Self-esteem, though an important quality to possess, has not been shown to be an indicator of prospective work ability. Albert Bandura (1994), the pioneer of social cognitive theory, established the correlation between feelings of self and subsequent work. This is the theory of self-efficacy, which refers to a belief in one's abilities to achieve certain outcomes. Bandura found that self-efficacy expectations influence subsequent performance. Its predictive effectiveness in the real world has been demonstrated in numerous studies. Bandura also found that the most effective way to create a strong sense of efficacy is through mastery experiences, or those tasks that an individual has executed successfully.

Raelin (2008) extended Bandura's self-efficacy to the work environment and established work self-efficacy. Work self-efficacy is defined as confidence in handling workplace experiences. His theory is based on the concept that people with higher work self-efficacy are more likely to undertake duties and be successful in the workplace. Work achievement, then, increases self-efficacy through a feedback loop connecting later performance to an increased self-efficacy attitude. Raelin (2007, n.d.) developed an inventory that represents the characteristics of work self-efficacy. These characteristics include confidence in learning and problem solving; ability to handle pressure; confidence in understanding one's role at work; teamwork; demonstrating sensitivity to others; and confidence in managing politics. The inventory characteristics are all indicative of the skill of navigating the workplace (Raelin, 2010).

It is important to distinguish self-confidence from work self-efficacy. Self-confidence, although a desirable trait, does not translate into success at work. Interestingly, Stankov and Lee (2008) found that African-American students, those attending two-year colleges in particular, possess an "overconfidence bias," which is an unrealistically positive view of themselves.

My students, who are largely minority group members, tend to lack professional role models in their communities, families, and even in popular culture. There is often a lack of vital motivational forces, such as family pressure, to become a professional. Frequently, the students cannot see themselves as future professionals because they lack the modeling, motivations, and opportunities to develop into a professional. Although the students do not lack self-esteem, they do lack work self-efficacy.

The competency of grasping the realities of the workplace has been defined as an ability to navigate the cultural, operational, and political dynamics of the business world (Enslin, 2010). Because the characteristics of work self-efficacy also demonstrate an ability to navigate the business world, I believe that when students show increased work self-efficacy, they achieve the career competency of grasping the realities of the workplace.

Background of student responses. Student reflective essays demonstrate that the direct service transactions performed during service-learning profoundly increased their work self-efficacy, thus providing them with the workplace competency of grasping the realities of the workplace. In their essays, the majority of students focused on how the experience affected them. Interestingly, students wrote more about this subject than any other, especially the students in the Immigration Law class.

Student responses. The following responses from students in the Family Law class illustrate the profound effect that the service had on the students' confidence in their ability to handle professional work in the future:

Honestly, the experience influenced me even more to become a lawyer, and actually be on someone's side when they need it.

I am taking this service very seriously because I like it. I see myself in the future doing the same thing or something similar.

The Immigration Law students were able to see a more immediate effect they had on clients by answering the questions of noncitizens or by seeing the resolution of a case from start to finish. They wrote enthusiastic and expansive essays about their increased self-efficacy:

Today is a day that adds into my important experiences in life. Thank you, Professor Ramson, for giving me this opportunity to do this. I had a pleasure answering people's questions, I felt like a professional. I felt as if I was really in my work field. . . . The people that I met there, they treated me with respect. I'm strongly considering working in the law field and making it my career! Today made me realize that this is something that I can really do for a living, all it takes is dedication.

I felt like I was having a job interview for USCIS. I knew what I was doing.

To be honest, at first I wasn't excited to volunteer at Citizenship Now, but I am so glad that I got the chance to experience what it was like. It felt good to actually use my knowledge of Immigration Law and help others. This experience made me feel important, smart and actually made me think twice about the career I am aiming for.

By participating in the call-in, I got [to] help my friends and families once I got home.

Even thou [sic] I was nervous to sit down and answer phone calls of people . . . it made me feel smart. . . . There was this phone call from the sister of a legal immigrant woman that was

holding a visa who had to travel while pregnant. The baby was born out of the U.S. The sister wanted to know if the child could be a citizen. Based on the facts, I figured it out that it could be. . . . When I felt the relief she had released over the phone I felt so happy and right there and then I had the urge of wanting to learn more, the anxiety of pushing further on my studies, skills and my knowledge and to become an immigration attorney so that I could try to help my people.

Competency #3: Developing Global Citizenship/Competency

Background. Globalization has been impacted by the advent of the Internet and other technologies that have facilitated global interconnectivity and interaction and global information dissemination (Kho, 2010). Global competency is fast becoming a high priority for entry-level employees (Gabbard, Starks, Jagers, & Cappiccie, 2011). Traditional attributes of being a global citizen include communicating in a language other than English, being knowledgeable about the world, and being an informed and active citizen (Koprucu, 2009). A contemporary interpretation of global competence emphasizes broad-mindedness and a social conscience (Wilson, 2010). Qualities attributed to global citizens presently include thinking outside of the box; working, leading, and motivating people from different cultures; serving the community; and being socially responsible (Armstrong, 2006).

The ability to work in a multicultural environment is especially important in the United States (Stewart, 2007). Each year the country is becoming increasingly more diverse, with the result that in the near future no ethnic group will command a majority (El Nasser, 2010). Each of the neighborhoods of New York City, the city in which my students will likely seek employment, has dramatically diversified. It is currently the second most pluralistic city in the country (Roberts, 2008).

The diversification of the United States has occurred in large part due to immigration. During the last five years, across the entire country, the issue of immigration has emerged as a charged and highly visible one. Unfortunately, this has resulted in a palpable divide among Americans who are either pro-immigrant or anti-immigrant (Archibold & Thee-Brenan, 2010). Another factor relevant to my students, which has emerged due to the economic recession, is the fear of some African-American community members that Latino immigrants will take jobs away from them (Rojas, 2006).

A method of promoting a contemporary definition of global competence is to provide students with the opportunity to work with culturally

diverse populations between and within national borders (Koskinen & Tossavainen, 2003). Service-learning experiences, which expose students to diverse populations in the community, have been shown to provide students with a transformative opportunity that stimulates self-awareness and growth (Burnett, Hamel, & Long, 2004).

Background of student responses. Although immigration law has a built-in international context, I found that actual interaction with the immigrant community and reflection on this experience facilitated a change of perspective in all students. Whether they were citizens or immigrants themselves or had family members who were immigrants, the students exhibited a profound change in their perceptions and attitudes toward immigrants. The students began to see immigrants as individuals instead of as a generalized group and began to respect the profound challenges that noncitizens face to attain a place in American society. The immigrant students saw that there are other immigrants in the city like themselves. This recognition helps to build community citizenship and, in actuality, has spurred some students to become active in their communities (Prentice & Robinson, 2007).

Citizen students with no personal connection to immigrants were able to bond on a personal level with people from different countries and cultures. Moreover, some students demonstrated that they had experienced a substantial transformation by confronting their own prejudices and changing their prior perception about immigrants. This latter shift in attitude is essential for a young adult preparing to embark on a professional career, especially in New York City (Brown, Cober, Keeping, & Levy, 2006). Prejudice abounds in this country (Smith, 1998). Adolescents begin to form cliques in middle and high school with other students who resemble themselves, which acts to disconnect them from other ethnicities or even others within their own ethnic group (Tolson & Urberg, 1993). At Hostos, for example, the African-American and Hispanic students often self-segregate, thus perpetuating a parochial perspective and discouraging interethnic relations. Service-learning provides the tools to enable young adults to transcend stereotypes and become more inclusive (Moore, 2006).

Through service-learning experiences in Family Court, students observed child abuse, domestic violence, juvenile delinquency, and many other ills of an urban society. This intimate confrontation with poverty and other inequities of society helped them to grasp inner-city social issues. This, in turn, appeared to help foster empathy for others, a quality associated with personal maturation (Koskinen & Tossavainen, 2003).

Student responses. The following responses from the Family Law students to the survey question "How did you feel about helping the

community?" demonstrate that the students are developing an awareness both of the problems facing community members and their responsibility to assist them:

Feels great to help people find solutions.

I would like to continue to work in the Family Court and continue to help family [sic] in need.

In the Immigration Law class, the same survey question elicited passion from all students. The students responded to this survey question first by identifying their status as an immigrant, a first-generation American, or a citizen born in the U.S., demonstrating that the national debate on immigration has understandably impacted them. The following student responses are from students who are immigrants or first-generation Americans. They identified with the clients and echoed the sentiments expressed by the Family Law students by acknowledging a responsibility to assist their respective community:

Citizen Call-in was an enlightening experience for me. It was a pleasing feeling, helping people like me—immigrants! I migrated in 1982 from Casguas, Puerto Rico. I found it a new path for community service. I thought it to be a simple resolution to matters of helping a wide range of people with their immigration concerns.

I volunteer now in many activities after I took this class like the other CUNY Citizenship Now! clinics. I enrolled my son in different volunteer activities. It is a great feeling to share your time with others.

We have to stand up for one another when it matters most.

I am an immigrant, and I could feel what that person is passing through and help them understand the process.

United States in a nation of immigrant and as [sic] immigrant we need to help each other in order to live the American Dream.

The following responses from students who were legal citizens demonstrated an attitudinal transformation from a preconceived anti-immigrant mindset to a tolerant, empathetic one:

I am a citizen but in a way I seemed to have some kind of connection with the clients being helped.

For a long time I have had my own views on Immigration but doing this call-in taught me that no matter where your [sic] from we should all have a chance to become citizens here in the

U.S. because of all the wonderful opportunities and benefits we have here in the U.S.

Overall, it also makes me realize how important it is to others what we can take for granted, citizenship.

I believe that we are all immigrants in the United States because whether we like it or not we all have different backgrounds when it comes to original route traits, like originally being from countries such as, Dominican Republic, Spain, Mexico, Africa, Germany, Honduras, Italy, etc.

Being a person born in the United States, I will admit that I have been pretty naive to the process of becoming a citizen here. . . . I do understand why people would want to come here, and I do support it. Everyone has migrated here at some point in history, so this whole idea of being against immigration is just ignorant and selfish.

Perspective of Service-Learning Community Organizations

A thorough evaluation of the efficacy of service-learning in developing career competencies must include the community service organizations' perspective of the service-learning experience.

New York State Family Court

George Cafasso, deputy chief clerk for the New York State Family Courts, who has supervisory coordination duties for all service-learning Family Court students, wrote the following about the service-learning experience from the community partner viewpoint:

Students who work in the Family Court get firsthand knowledge of and experience with the realities of Family Court operations. The students interact directly with court users and get a unique insight into the problems that bring them to court. The issues dealt within Family Court are highly sensitive and confidential in nature. Court users are often faced with serious personal issues and under great stress. Students get invaluable experience in dealing face to face with the public and have an opportunity to utilize knowledge and skills learned in college in a very real and up-close environment. (G. Cafasso, personal communication, February 6, 2012)

Mr. Cafasso's statement illustrates his recognition that students gained a depth of knowledge in family law proceedings along with global competency skills by encountering individuals with severe social problems and developing empathy for the people and the community's issues.

Direct supervisors of the students have noted in letters of recommendation that the students had achieved essential employment proficiencies, including competence, increased work self-efficacy, and awareness of the social and legal issues of the Bronx community. The supervisor of one student who provided service in the Self-Represented Division Petition room wrote, "She impressed us as professional, courteous, and eager to learn" (M. Williams, personal communication, December 15, 2011). For a second student in the same site, another supervisor wrote, "She had a strong grasp of the important work being done in Family Court in addition to the greater impact on the community at large. She is optimistic and determined to make an important impact in the legal field" (V. Bullard, personal communication, January 3, 2012).

CUNY Citizenship Now!

The second major community organization with which my students partnered, CUNY Citizenship Now!, echoed the perspective of the Family Court representatives about the benefits students accrue as a result of service-learning experience. Special Projects Coordinator Kymete Gashi, who has personally observed all of my students at every CUNY Citizenship Now! event since 2007, observed the following:

Participation in CUNY Citizenship Now! events is a great way for students to assimilate the concepts about immigration law acquired in the classroom. At both the Call-in and our citizenship application assistance events, students interact with immigrants, who tell them about their particular immigration cases.

During the call-in, they have the opportunity to ask questions from experienced attorneys so that they can relay the information to the callers. At the citizenship application assistance events, students usually are placed in the application assistance station, where they assist applicants filling out the N-400 forms. At the orientation they are reminded of red flags and are guided on how to complete challenging questions in the form.

At both events, students are exposed to real case scenarios, which helps them to more easily comprehend the theory acquired in the classroom and to improve their ability to grasp the law concepts necessary to analyze the facts of a particular case.

In addition to experiential learning, our events help students develop customer service skills, team work skills, and communications skills. Our call-in and events provide an opportunity to practice language skills. All of the skills mentioned are transferable from one job to another, and between fields. Our events also provide an opportunity for students to be exposed to a multicultural environment, to various New York neighborhoods and populations. Furthermore, students develop an intuition to ask questions to prompt specific information from participants and may develop their legal interviewing techniques. Students are able to interact with more seasoned immigration professionals, network with them, and learn about immigration topics from them. Lastly, on occasion, students may experience delivering bad news to participants who are not eligible for the immigration benefit that they are seeking. (K. Gashi, personal communication, February 15, 2012)

Ms. Gashi found that while meeting the community needs, the student had developed important career competencies. In addition to recognizing that my students were translating their academic theory about naturalization into a real context and learning about legal inquiry, she saw that students were acquiring the broader work-related skills of client contact, communication, teamwork, networking, and global competency.

Conclusions

The convergence of workplace pressures and the increased concern for real-world results have led to a paradigm shift in college education, the inclusion of experiential education. Ironically, this new reform has its underpinnings in the philosophy of John Dewey (1938), who, over 100 years ago, espoused the philosophy that experience is the true educator. Internships, the classic model of experiential education, impart some of the competencies required by employers. However, to fulfill the expansive list of skills that present employers require at the extremely high level they demand, other modes of experiential education must be incorporated into the curriculum. Service-learning has emerged as a significant approach because many of its intrinsic characteristics that enable students to rapidly convert college education to practice, grasp the realities of a professional setting, and develop global proficiency.

Nevertheless, two areas require more study. First, factors that encourage faculty buy-in should be examined, because inclusion of service-learning in a course is heavily reliant upon faculty initiative. Moreover, education about the benefits of this modality would counter antipathy and miscon-

ceptions in the academy. Second, because work self-efficacy has proven to be a key ingredient in imparting work competencies to my diverse student population, a study of a more traditional student body or a study of students at a four-year college should be performed to corroborate that service-learning increases work self-efficacy in all students.

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