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Social Capital: Lessons from a Service-Learning Program
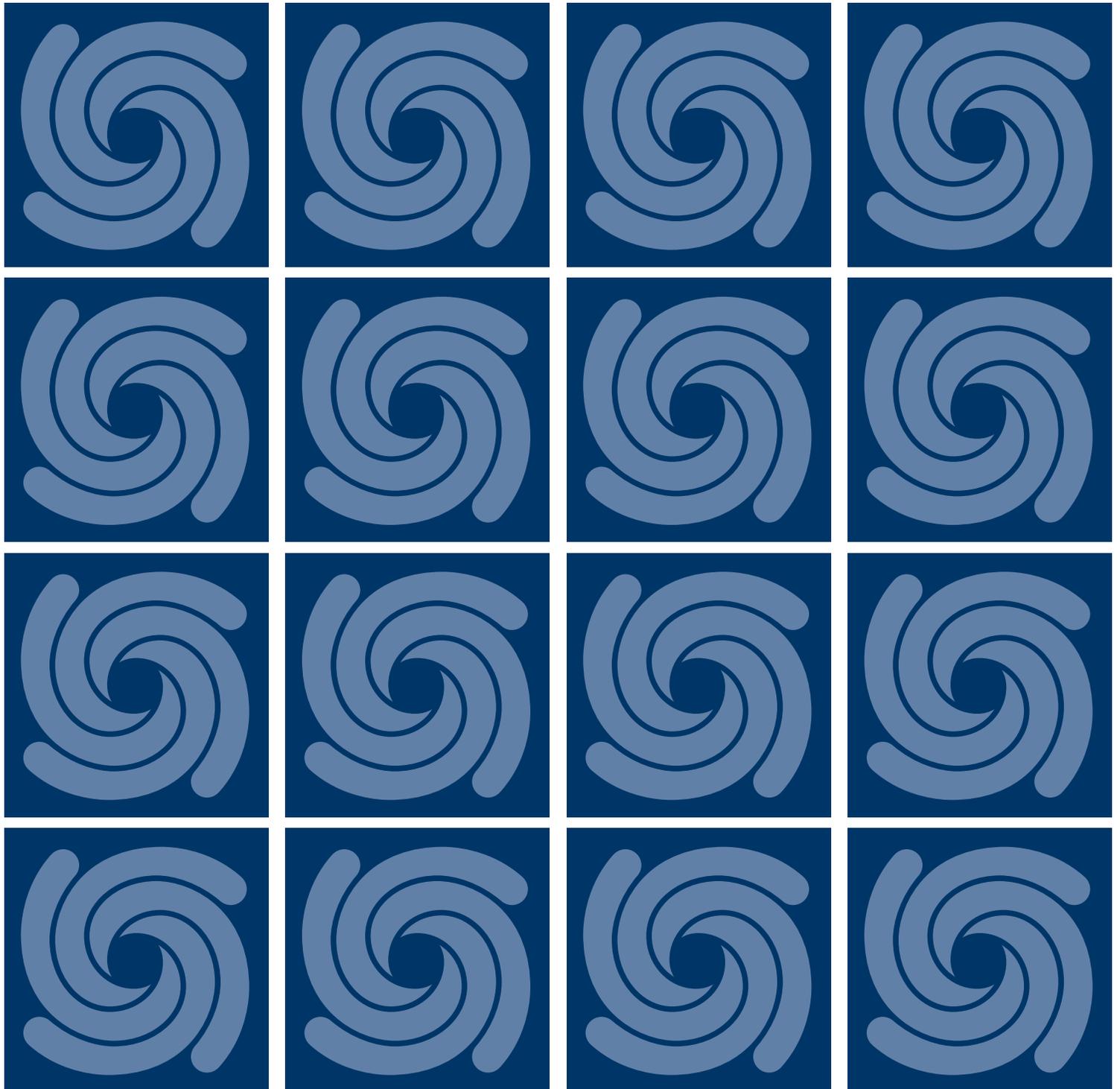
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INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly complex society, public administrators continue to pursue their ultimate goal of maintaining a democratic society. Confronted with decreasing civic engagement and social capital, universities are being sought as partners in the movement to address our faltering democracy. University based service-learning programs provide an opportunity to address our faltering democracy, while addressing the University mission of service to the community. Empirical research, using CASE, the Rutgers University service-learning program, was conducted to further explore the possibility (D'Agostino 2006).

According to Frederickson (1982), public administration, in its origins, was directly associated with what constitutes a community and the role of citizens in community. Woodrow Wilson noted that in a democracy the people are sovereign, not the monarch; therefore, public administration should be influenced by and responsive to the people (Wilson 1887). In other words a democratic government is not "a family business dominated by its patriarch; it is not a military battalion or a political campaign headquarters, it is a producing organization, which belongs to its members" (Mosher 1974, p. 362). According to Frederickson, early public administration reflected this perspective: "It was fully assumed that public administration was a full partner in the search for good government" (1982, p. 502). These beliefs were reflected in the early schools of public administration, such as the Maxwell Graduate School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University, which offered courses on the topics of democracy and the U.S. Constitution (Frederickson, 1982).

However, even with the creation of new governance mechanisms, "something is wrong" (Frederickson, 1982). The deficiency of citizen involvement is placing American democracy at risk. Diminishing civic engagement negatively affects democracy (Putnam, 2000; Harwood, 1991) because it is only when people participate in their own

self-rule that government is legitimate (Macedo et al., 2005). The erosion of democratic civic culture, and a corresponding growth in civic apathy, has in part been caused by a decline in social capital (Barber & Battistoni, 1993; Putnam 1995), that is, resources that individuals and groups access in social networks and mobilize for purposive action. Ostrom (1996) interpreted the 'erosion' of civic culture and the decrease of social capital as a "serious and shocking question" concerning the future of American democracy.

Citizen participation is fundamental to democratic governance. The problem has been addressed in the citizen participation literature in a myriad of ways, including the use of technology to involve citizens in the decision making process. Today, as the discussion among public administrators transposes from good government to good governance, that is "practices and processes for people to participate in the work of government" (Bingham, Nabatchi and O'Leary 2005), there is still, regardless of new governance mechanisms, a need to get citizens involved in an effective manner for governance to be successful (Bingham, Nabatchi and O'Leary 2005). One of the proposed solutions advocated by many, including Barber and Battistoni (1993), Putnam (2000), and the Corporation for National and Community Service (2002), is civic education–specifically service-learning. Service-learning fosters the development of citizenship attributes and skills. More significantly, as emphasized by Dufour (2005), "service-learning supports the idea that the university can help produce and enrich social capital."

Service-learning has the potential to build social capital, as it emphasizes collaboration among the different stakeholders as well as fostering the development of citizenship attributes and skills. The university has been identified as the most fitting place to have a service-learning program (Jacoby 1996). However, much is to be done for the potential contributions of service-learning to be realized. Here I define service-learning, discuss the need for it, its potential for build-

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ing social capital and describe preliminary lessons learned based on empirical research completed using CASE, the Rutgers University service-learning program (D'Agostino 2006). The hope is to bring service-learning and social capital into the mainstream of research in the public administration community and into higher education.

WHAT IS SOCIAL CAPITAL?

The basic idea of social capital is that a person's family, friends, and associates constitute an important asset. This asset can be called on in a crisis, enjoyed for its own sake, and leveraged for material gain. What is true for individuals, moreover, also holds true for groups. Those communities endowed with a diverse stock of social networks and civic associations are in a stronger position to confront poverty and vulnerability, resolve disputes, and take advantage of new opportunities.

Although social capital has become a trendy term used by politicians and professors worldwide (Farr, 2004), the term remained relatively obscure until it was reintroduced by Bourdieu (1983) and Coleman (1998, 1990). Bourdieu (1983, p. 248) defined social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutional-ized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition - or in other words, to membership in a group." Therefore, according to Bourdieu's definition, social capital involves network ties and the transfor-mation of these ties into relationships that imply "durable obligations felt" (1983, p. 250). Coleman (1988) stated that social capital is defined by its function. That is, social capital is a multiplicity of entities that facilitates the actions of actors within a social structure. These properties are key for understanding how social capital is created. Furthermore, he argued that social capital is not located in the actor but in the relation-ship between and among actors, and is created through the changes in the relations among people. Moreover, social capital functions as a resource for the individuals of

that group. Even though social capital is not located in the individual, it can be used for collective or individual ends. Therefore, similar to other forms of capital, social capital is productive and makes ends possible that in its absence would not be.

In sum, social capital refers to resources that individuals and groups access in social networks and mobilize for purpo-sive action (Lin 2001; Paxton 1999; Bourdieu 1989; Putnam, 1993, 1995). Social capital is based on the idea that individuals and groups can temporarily borrow resources through their connec-tion with one another (Lin 2001; Paxton 1999).

WHAT IS SERVICE-LEARNING?

University based service-learning attempts to involve students in community service projects that are coordinated between the school and community. Service-learning, borrowed from the field of experiential education, seeks to connect contemporary social problems to the curriculum in order to encourage reflection and analysis. According to Dewey, "Experiential learning…transforms the individual, revises and enlarges knowledge, and alters practice." It affects their perceptions and interpretations of the world (Keeton, 1983, p. 1, as cited in Stanton, 1999). According to Stanton (1999), "service-learning appears to be an approach to experiential learning, an expression of values — service to others, community development and empowerment, reciprocal learning — which determines the purpose, nature and process of social and educational exchange between learners and people they serve, and between experiential education programs and the community organizations with which they work" (Stanton, 1999, p. 5).

Through the integration of community projects into the academic curriculum, lessons in the classroom serve as the basis for reflection and examination of the citizen's role in the community. Service-learning is pedagogy, a teaching method based in experience, where students take part in a

service activity that meets a community need. Time for reflection, a service-learning requirement, and further understanding of the course content and an appreciation of civic responsibility are also fostered (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995).

Supporters of service-learning (Putnam, 1995, 2000; Garman, 1995) argue that service-learning programs may eliminate those factors (e.g., narrow self-interest, lack of trust) that discourage participation and service in the community. The long-term benefits of service-learning impact all that are involved in the program, both students and community.

SERVICE-LEARNING AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

L. J. Hanifan, a progressive educator, is acknowledged as one of the first to use and define social capital (Putnam, 1995; Farr, 2004). Hanifan stated that the political, economic, and social problems in the rural school system where he worked were the result of abandoned customs. In 1916, Hanifan coined the term *social capital* in an effort to endorse the renewal of community:

> "In the use of the phrase *social capital* I make no reference to the usual acceptation of the term capital, except in a figurative sense. I do not refer to real estate, or to personal property or to cold cash, but rather to that in life which tends to make these tangible substances count for most in the daily lives of people, namely goodwill, fellowship, mutual sympathy and social intercourse among a group of individu-als and families who make up a social unit, the rural community, whose logical center is the school" (p. 78).

Hanifan's *The Community Center* proposed several creative programs to address social problems. Hanifan (1916) and Dewey (1916) both spoke of experiential education as a means of increasing social capital so that community may be revived.

Social capital, although often community

In 1988, Edward Bloustein, the late president of Rutgers University, complained that some Americans' "self absorption" and "xenophobic sense of self" have resulted in the ignoring of the country's poor and the undervaluing of our diversity. His response to this problem: "I propose that we look at community service as a necessary component of the learning experience which constitutes a liberal education"

generated, can be fostered through state institutions such as the education system (Print & Coleman, 2003) as demonstrated by Dewey and Hanifan. Education has a strong impact on social capital (Putnam, 1995, 2000). Print and Coleman (2003) posited that through education, governments worldwide could guide youth to understand the societies in which they live. Schools offer the opportunities not only to teach elements of social capital but also to apply aspects of social capital through planned activities. However, there is a need for planned activities that facilitate social capital in the civics or citizen education curricula (Patrick, 1999). One such possibility is service-learning. Service-learning makes possible the development of networks and resources beyond individuals' usual social circles. In fact, as argued by Lin (1982), it is the establishment and awareness of resources that may enable individuals to gain better information and influence and thus motivate individuals to become involved active members of a community.

SERVICE-LEARNING AND HIGHER EDUCATION

According to Wieckowski, "Higher education in the United States was founded on the broad proposition that the purpose of education is to enable people to render service to society" (Jacoby, 1996, p. 207). While service is often included in the mission statement of universities, it is considered subordinate to teaching and research (Holland, 1997). The diminution of involvement in community (Skocpol and Fiorina 1999) has spurred a national interest to find a means of strengthening the civic mission of higher education (Boyte & Hollander, 1999; Erlich, 1999; Saltmarsh, 2002).

According to Astin (1994, as cited in Jacoby, 1996), service-learning is the most effective means of achieving higher education's stated mission: "to produce educated citizens who understand and appreciate not only how democracy is supposed to work but also their own responsibility to become active and informed participants in it" (p. 24). Another

goal of higher education is to prepare students for the world of work. (Service-learning provides opportunities for students to develop the cognitive skills necessary to apply academic knowledge.)

Academics (Holland 1999; Rice, 1996; Zlotkowski, 1999) argue that service-learning is compatible with the renewed awareness of the collaborative mission of universities. Service-learning programs are capable of involving students in collaborative learning, enhancing student development and contributing to the development of future civic involvement (Markus, Howard, & King, 1993; Sax & Astin, 1997). The adoption of service-learning programs in universities is a "good choice" (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000). It augments not only student achievement but the role of community in civic education as well (Harkavy, 1996, 1998; Hatcher, 1997).

CASE BACKGROUND

In 1988, Edward Bloustein, the late president of Rutgers University, complained that some Americans' "self absorption" and "xenophobic sense of self" (Annual Report, 2002-2003) have resulted in the ignoring of the country's poor and the undervaluing of our diversity. His response to this problem: "I propose that we look at community service as a necessary component of the learning experience which constitutes a liberal education" (Annual Report 2002-2003, p.26). This call brought into existence, in 1989, the Rutgers University service-learning program, Citizenship and Service Education (CASE), and the embodiment of Bloustein's vision. The success of the program was recognized when then President Clinton came to Rutgers on March 1, 1993 to announce his national service plan. He also recognized Rutgers' CASE program as a model for colleges and universities throughout the United States.

Bloustein's idea dedicated Rutgers to meeting three goals critical to all Americans:

The collapse of community
The failure of our educational institutions to

prepare young people with the skills to succeed economically and be good citizens Concern about the growing chasm between have and have-not communities

In an effort to achieve these goals, the CASE mission is to:

Prepare students to participate as active and effective citizens in a democratic society and to teach a lifelong service ethic
Improve undergraduate education and assist students in their professional development through Service-Learning
Advance the service mission of Rutgers University to New Jersey citizens
Offer New Jersey communities the opportunity to tap Rutgers' resources in order to meet community-identified needs

Today CASE is continually evolving to develop new modes of achieving these goals, such as *njserves.org*, a link connecting individuals with government in order to better collaborate.

PRELIMINARY LESSONS LEARNED and RECOMMENDATIONS

It is difficult to access whether or not service-learning will be successful in ultimately building social capital. Service-learning, in particular the Rutgers University CASE program, features several levels of success indicators ranging from advancing the service mission of the university, to the preparation of students to participate as active and effective citizens in a democratic society and meeting community-identified needs. In the meantime, CASE, the Rutgers University service-learning program, has demonstrated significant short-term successes, not the least of which is the potential to increase social capital (D'Agostino 2006). Furthermore, CASE already offers important lessons specific to integration of the program within the university, academic culture and the process.

INTEGRATION OF SERVICE-LEARNING

Optional or mandatory CASE courses are offered across the curriculum, except core courses. Furthermore, of the 174 service-learning students who participated in the CASE study, approximately 120 took service-learning as an option, while the remaining took service-learning as a mandatory component of the course (D'Agostino 2006). The findings indicate that besides service-learning, other components that provide evidence for predicting social capital are pre-existing college social capital and pre-existing high school social capital (D'Agostino 2006).[1] The integration of service-learning with the university requires administrators to recognize that service-learning be a mandatory, and not an optional, component of the curriculum (D'Agostino 2006). The Rutgers CASE program, along with previous studies, such as Eyler and Giles (1999), maintain that those students involved in extracurricular activities, volunteering, or similar endeavors are most likely to take a service-learning course (D'Agostino 2006). In addition, these same studies illustrate the traditional majority composition of service-learning participants to be white females. Unfortunately, those students who are most in need of opportunities afforded by service-learning may not voluntarily choose the course (D'Agostino 2006). However, if service-learning were mainstreamed throughout the core curriculum, opportunities to afford all students the same opportunity could be streamlined (D'Agostino 2006).

ACADEMIC CULTURE

Currently, efforts have been made by universities to address the problem of community development through service-learning programs. In an attempt to institutionalize service-learning, organizations such as Campus Compact have been created and greatly expanded to provide support and also indicators and measurements of a successful service-learning program (D'Agostino 2006). Although there has been an increase in the number and variety of service-learning

programs, there is no normative model for service-learning (Wurtzdorf & Giles, 1997). However, there is a consensus among practitioners as to what composes a service-learning program. The structure of a service-learning program is considered a key factor in the program's success (Putnam, 1995; Dufour, 2005). Moreover, Dufour (2005) emphasizes the importance of the quality of service-learning in terms of social capital outcome. The five components of a good service-learning program, as identified by Eyler and Giles (1999) are:

■ *Placement quality* is the establishment of connections with the community in order that students are placed in productive situations and are useful to the community. Service-learning is considered to start with the service; thus, if the service is not productive, then the learning may not be as productive.

■ *Application* concerns the ability to link the classroom and the community. It is considered one of the strongest predictors of perspective transformation, critical thinking, and problem solving.

■ *Reflection,* both written and discussion, is the connection between service and learning. This explicit attention to reflection allows the space and time for students to step back and reflect on their experiences. The impact of this component has been considered necessary for impact to occur as the result of service-learning.

■ *Diversity* refers to the opportunity to interact with individuals of different ethnic, religious, and gender groups during their service. The presence of these characteristics contributes to the outcomes of critical thinking, transformation of social perspectives, sustained community involvement, and intellectual change.

■ *Community voice* is a component that refers to meeting community needs. This means working with the community on jointly useful projects (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

Rutgers University's CASE, as structured and

implemented, reflects the essential elements necessary for a successful service-learning program as defined by Eyler and Giles (1999) (D'Agostino 2006). Although it was determined, based on survey research and statistical analysis, that CASE had an impact on social capital when analyzing the two main components of social capital, trust and networks, service-learning was a predictor of networks and not trust (D'Agostino 2006). These findings were more clearly understood analyzing student comments about their CASE experience, according to the five components that comprise good practice in service-learning (D'Agostino 2006). Students communicated:

> "…The instructors at the day care center were not very welcoming and seemed to have little knowledge of the program;" "I wasn't utilized at the Red Cross – we made red, white and blue pins for people and I spent 3 hours making photocopies one day. It didn't relate to the seminar;" "I did not feel enough was done in order for me to be influenced in any of the topics above…;" "Prof out much of semester. There was no link between social issues and CASE assignments that were discussed in class. CASE assignments were "busy work" and didn't count in any real meaningful social relevance and the activities were unorganized and not monitored by anyone;" "More discussions needed" (D'Agostino 2006).

Therefore, the university's commitment and support to service-learning must move beyond institutional change and emphasis on program structure and address issues of academic culture, such as incentives for

professors to teach service-learning (i.e., course release, fewer publications) and service-learning teacher training, in order for it to be effective (Saltmarsh 2002) and contribute to building social capital (D'Agostino 2006).

THE PROCESS

Many public administrators seek modes to better involve citizens in the deliberative process to permit for democratic governance. In terms of the social capital, the CASE service-learning program is a significant mode of addressing the civic engagement problem (D'Agostino 2006). As public administrators are seeking means of including citizens in the deliberative process, and universities are being encouraged to step forward to fulfill their civic mission, joint efforts could effectively address the problem (D'Agostino 2006). Service-learning provides an effective opportunity for the different stakeholders to work together. The CASE program is designed to facilitate coordination and collaboration of its students, faculty and the community (D'Agostino 2006).

The goal of CASE's orientation session is to ensure that students who are sent out into the community are prepared for any situation they may encounter. During the orientation, students have the opportunity to participate in sessions held by CASE staff and Community Partner representatives, and to discuss issues such as cultural diversity, service-learning and how to avert potential problems that may occur on site (CASE Student Orientation Packet 2004). Community Partners (CPs) are a vital and necessary component of the CASE program. CPs are recruited in various ways: community organizations may express interest in becoming a CP, or faculty members or students may suggest organizations. In June of each year, a Community Partner Conference is held to inform the participating organizations about how CASE is currently operating. Consequently, every organization involved in the CASE program is required to send the volunteer coordinator or CASE liaison to the Conference (CASE Community Partner Conference Packet, 2004).

CPs play an active role in the placement

process. Before the beginning of each semester, they are asked to update their information on the CASE web site. CPs also interview prospective CASE students to facilitate their placement, by explaining the organization's mission, its day-to-day work, responsibilities that they may be expected to hold within the organization, and possibilities beyond the coursework and semester. At the same time, students are given the opportunity to decide whether this is an appropriate organization for them. In addition, CPs are required to provide CASE students with an orientation (in addition to the University orientation). Orientation is considered essential for providing a better sense of their role within the organization and the significance of the work they will be doing. It is suggested that students be given a tour of the facilities, introduced to other staff and/or volunteers, and provided with literature about the organization, work duties, office policies, and emergency procedures. All other policies are discussed as well (CASE Community Partner Conference Packet 2004).

CASE provides instructors with a faculty orientation and assists with the development of appropriate Community Partner placements. CASE also keeps in contact with the instructors throughout the semester (CASE Faculty Orientation Packet 2004).

As public administrators are seeking means of including citizens in the deliberative process, and universities are being encouraged to step forward to fulfill their civic mission, joint efforts could effectively address the problem (D'Agostino 2006). The foundation for the different stakeholders to work together is provided by CASE (D'Agostino 2006). However, further efforts could be taken to create a collaborative work environment by providing an orientation or conference for all stakeholders to attend, including community partners in the formulation of class syllabi, creating a systematic mode of recruiting professors to teach service-learning and providing a service-learning conference or orientation at the beginning of each semester.

CONCLUSION

The CASE program offers a number of lessons with respect to encouraging the

building of social capital. In addition, its analysis contributes to an understanding of community relations and experiential education. In light of the lessons learned, the CASE program also contributes to our understanding of how to design and implement effective service-learning programs. As the discussion among public administrators transposes from government to governance, there remains the necessity to effectively include citizens in the decision making process. Public administration is faced with the challenge of making governance work. The inclusion of social capital in public administration teaching and research is a significant step toward achieving this goal.

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[1] *Pre-existing high school social capital* is defined as social capital that existed during high school. An eight-item index was developed by combining questions used to measure the composite variable. *College social capital* is defined as social capital that existed during college. An eight-item index was developed by combining questions used to measure the composite variable

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