



Campus Compact

Professionalizing the Community Service/Service-Learning Director Role

By Barbara Jacoby, Director, Office of Community Service-Learning, University of Maryland

What does it really mean to be a *professional* community service or service-learning director? I was challenged to address this topic by Barbara Canyes, Executive Director of Massachusetts Campus Compact, in a daylong institute preceding the New England Campus Compact (NECC) conference in April 2003. As I pursued the topic in conversations with the conference planning team and colleagues around the country who serve along with me in this demanding position, the need to focus on community service directors (CSDs) and service-learning directors (SLDs) *as professionals* became increasingly clear. Some of the salient issues raised in these conversations are:

- Individuals enter the CSD/SLD role from various backgrounds, including faculty, student affairs, the ministry, community-based organizations, and national service programs. As a result, they have widely varying types and levels of knowledge, skills, and experience.
- The role is often not clearly defined, and expectations of the individuals in it are frequently unrealistic. Many CSDs/SLDs find themselves trying to “be all things to all people.” This results in a high burnout rate and high turnover in a position where consistency over time is critical to building relationships on and off campus.
- Although several excellent schemas exist for program assessment, there is no model or rubric that CSDs/SLDs can use to assess their individual levels of knowledge and skills in key areas,
- As a result, CSDs/SLDs lack the means to prepare for a move into new or expanded roles at their current institution or other institutions. This includes moving from the role of CSD to SLD or vice-versa, or adding academic service-learning or volunteer service responsibilities to one’s role.
- The lack of an accepted core of knowledge and skills and an accompanying “curriculum” to for learning makes it difficult to prepare young people for the CSD/SLD role.

Given these needs and concerns, I proceeded, with some trepidation, to design an institute for the NECC conference. The institute focused on several areas that addressed the question of “What does it mean to be a professional CSD/SLD?” Here are a few of the answers we explored:

- Professionals base their work on a range of principles, standards, and models of good practice. They also continually examine these principles, standards, and models--embracing, modifying, rejecting, or rewriting them as appropriate.
- Professionals ground their practice in a working knowledge of student learning and community development.

- Professionals understand and operate effectively within the multiple and complex contexts in which they work, including institutions of higher education, communities, non-governmental organizations, and government on all levels.
- Professionals engage in regular evaluation, assessment, and research.
- Professionals stay up to date on trends and issues that relate to students, higher education, and communities.
- Professionals have a strong sense of commitment to their work that is rooted in their personal beliefs and dedication to positive social change and the common good.
- Professionals are reflective practitioners who actively participate in their own professional development and that of their colleagues.

I was pleased that I had a packed house for the institute and gratified that the participants actually stayed all day. Feedback I received following the institute reinforced my belief that there is a pressing need for further attention to the professionalization of the CSD/SLD role. Since the NECC institute, I have spent time with Campus Compact staff and colleagues around the country discussing this topic.

We have just begun to consider some possible means of providing a professional development curriculum for CSDs/SLDs. Possible delivery mechanisms include a “toolkit”-type workbook, a “traveling” one-day workshop, an online course, or some combination of these. Many other means are possible; these are only preliminary ideas. Any curriculum would include a way for CSDs/SLDs to conduct a preliminary self-assessment of their knowledge, skills, and areas for development.

At this point, I seek your thoughts and suggestions about what Campus Compact should do to increase the professional nature and stature of the CSD/SLD role. The following questions are a good starting point.

1. Do you see a need for professionalization of the CSD/SLD role? Is there any price to pay for such professionalization?
2. What do you see as the areas of greatest need for the professionalization of the CSD/SLD role?
3. What elements should be included in a “curriculum” designed to address these needs?
4. Is there a common core of knowledge and skills for *both* CSDs and SLDs?
5. Through what means should the “curriculum” be delivered to current and new CSDs/SLDs?
6. What are *you* willing to contribute to this process?

Please send your comments to Pam Mutascio, Resource Coordinator for Campus Compact, at pmutascio@compact.org. I look forward to working with many of you to enhance the wonderful profession to which many of us have dedicated our hearts, minds, and spirits.

Barbara Jacoby is the editor of several books on service-learning, including [Building Partnerships for Service-Learning](#) (Jossey-Bass, 2003).