

Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions of Direct Service within Higher Education

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History

Direct Service is one of six Pathways of Public Service and Civic Engagement (Robinson, Wright, & Cohen, 2021) and is broadly implemented (Cohen & Kinsley, 1994; Levine, 1994; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993; O'Brien, 1993) within higher education as a pedagogy and co-curricular program. Professors around the nation choose, or are asked, to include a direct service component to the pedagogy of their curriculum. Direct service is defined as working to address the immediate needs of individuals or a community, often involving contact with people, place, environments, or animals being served (Stanford, n.d.). Learning the historical development of direct service is paramount to understanding its prevalence within American colleges and universities (Harkins, 1996). There are many terms used in literature to describe direct service and further illustrates the need for the pathways framework to dissect the various ways of serving/volunteering. For the purposes of this literature review, the terms volunteerism, service, service learning, community engagement, and direct service are presented as described in the referenced literature. Significant effort was expended to verify all references to the aforementioned terms match as closely as possible the definition of direct service.

Direct service has a long national history. Early accounts of volunteerism in America started along with the urban centers that developed in the colonies. The first volunteer firehouse was started in Philadelphia by Benjamin Franklin in 1736. During this time, volunteerism was rooted in bettering the community and faith-based charity work.

The Revolutionary War was the first major volunteer recruitment effort in our nation's history. As the country recruited soldiers to join the army, everyday civilians also banded together to raise funds and boycott British goods. Throughout the country, volunteerism expanded beyond faith and the church and into patriotism. Volunteering was a way for ordinary people to demonstrate love for their country and support war efforts. In the 1800s, America saw a surge in volunteer activity. This expanded beyond religious causes and into philanthropic causes and the social reform movement. The Second Great Awakening, the religious revitalization movement of the 1820s, inspired large groups of American citizens to get involved with the issues that mattered to them. As the country continued to industrialize, these groups kicked off the spirit of reform that would continue to define American volunteerism.

As America's cities continued to grow, organizations aimed at addressing the wealth disparity were founded. Many of these major organizations still exist today. Some of these include the YMCA, the Salvation Army, the American Red Cross, and the United Way. While formal legislation and programs didn't arrive until much later, colleges and universities have also embraced the direct service ideology since the 1800s (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2008). The Great Depression and World War II in the early 1900s were accompanied by monumental direct service efforts and programs. Much of this was linked to a sense of belonging to and ownership of the American identity. In 1944, Franklin D Roosevelt signed the GI Bill. The bill "linked service and education to those members of our voluntary military" (Frasco, n.d). Direct service gained stronger footing within higher education with the Morrill Act (1962) which

increased agricultural and mechanical arts and engaged many students in direct service preparing fields, constructing buildings, and caring for livestock. In the same year, Frederick Rudolf stated, “From the beginning, the American college was cloaked with a public purpose” (Jacoby, 1996). This public purpose includes preparing the American citizenry to be civically engaged in public life (Smith, 1996). In fact, many early higher education administrators and researchers believed in universities’ role to function as democratic, civic, and community-engaged institutions dedicated to advancing learning and knowledge for social change.

Direct service began to be incorporated into college curriculum in the 1960s with the birth of traditional service-learning. One of John F Kennedy’s first official acts was to establish the Peace Corps in 1961. Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) followed in 1965 by Lyndon B Johnson and was viewed as the “domestic Peace Corps.” This program provided student financial benefits for the first time to people willing to serve their communities. Direct service efforts began to be launched across the country, including the Campus Outreach Opportunity League (1984), which helps mobilize service programs in higher education; the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (1985), which helps replicate youth corps in the states and cities; and Youth Service America (1985), through which many young people are given a chance to serve (Bringle, 2002). The Campus Compact was established in 1985 to provide support to higher education institutions in their service efforts.

The federal government took another substantial leap in support of direct service in the 1990s. The National Community Service Act (1990) officially endorsed and provided funds to support service within higher education. The Higher Education

Amendments of 1992 required higher education institutions to allocate five percent of their federal work-study program funds to “be used to compensate students engaged in community service” (Jacoby, 1996). The National and Community Service Trust Act (1993) created the Corporation for National and Community Service. As a result, a clearinghouse of community engagement research was created and, each year, there are over 270,000 AmeriCorps members contributing service toward issues of public concern nationwide. Following the model of the VISTA program, these members also receive a student financial benefit at the completion of their term of service. The 1990s also saw a significant uptick in the amount of literature, research, professional conferences, and graduation requirements focusing on service (Jacoby, 1996).

Today, roughly 8.9 million college students participate in community engagement annually. An estimated 6.4 million college students participate in service-learning annually (Ikeda & Yee, 2000). The distinction between direct service and service-learning is a connection to curriculum. Service-learning is a pedagogy in which students combine theory and academic study with the practical, real-world experience of volunteerism. When done correctly, the service enhances the academic concepts of the course and the academic study enhances the student’s experience in the community in a very reciprocal way (Ramaley, 2014). Direct service is often done in a co-curricular way and outside the direction of a course instructor. There are many ways college students engage in direct service including one-time service projects, alternative breaks, student government, clubs and organizations, and episodic volunteering to meet a community-identified need. This literature review will delve into the foundational knowledge of direct service; skills attributed to successful direct service engagement;

cultivated and innate attributes of those that engage in direct service; social impacts of direct service; and prospective change that can be effectuated by students that engage in direct service.

This literature review is a broad exploration of the direct service pathway centered on how a college student may become involved during their academic pursuits. Four foundational questions frame the review: What foundational knowledge would students pursue in this pathway? What skills would make students successful in this field? What attributes would the student have the opportunity to cultivate? What are the ways in which social impact is described within this pathway / how will students have the opportunity to affect change in this pathway?

Review of Literature

Foundational Knowledge

To many, direct service is a stop-gap, temporary answer to addressing issues of public concern until more long-term solutions can be implemented. This framework is referred to as the “charity v. justice” model of service. Charity refers to work that meets the immediate needs of individuals, families, and communities while justice involves systemic, long-term address to the underlying cause of social issues. As a result, the direct service pathway may take a back seat to the other five Pathways of Public Service and Civic Engagement (Stanford, n.d.) in terms of its ability to produce lasting change. Direct service is sometimes overlooked and deemed as less important than other forms of volunteerism with regard to impact on social issues (Keen & Hall, 2009).

Both charity and justice are equally important in addressing critical community needs. Moreover, direct service provides several critical functions in a higher education setting. Direct service programs are able to meet the immediate needs of individuals and offer harm reduction (Simons & Cleary, 2005). Individuals experiencing hardship need services and people to assist them with timely relief. Additionally, direct service has a strong connection to the cause. Volunteers in direct service are able to intimately interact with issue(s). A popular form of service is mutual aid. Dean Spade's work illustrates the ardent desire people feel to help in particular during times of crisis or disaster (2020). Outcomes and results can often be seen in a very short amount of time. This helps direct service volunteers feel good and positive about their volunteer work (Warren, 2012). As such, direct service is the most popular form of volunteerism.

Participation in direct service can have a lasting effect on students' lifelong civic engagement (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999). Direct service can act as a gateway for engaged students to understand and see their place among the other Pathways. Direct service allows students to interact with and better understand community issues (Simons & Cleary, 2005). This interaction often provides them with context of root causes and other ways in which they address issues of public concern at the system level (Armstrong, 2006). Recently, the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA completed a national study of the effects of President Bill Clinton's Learn and Serve America Higher Education Program, an activity of the Corporation for National Service, which is designed to facilitate the development of volunteer service programs for college students. This longitudinal multi-institutional study examined the effects of service participation after controlling for students' precollege propensity to engage in service.

Among other things, the study found that service participation positively affects students' commitment to their communities, to helping others in difficulty, to promoting racial understanding, and to influencing social values. Service participation is positively associated with a number of cognitive and affective outcomes during the undergraduate years and beyond (Astin & Sax, 1998).

Students need to gain some foundational knowledge to be as successful as possible in their direct service activities. It's important to gain a general knowledge of the community need. Nonprofit organizations understand the needs of their community well, often as a result of frequent needs assessments. Students should learn as much as possible the skills needed to complete the service project for which they've signed up and/or been assigned. Understanding the social context and where service fits on the continuum of responding to immediate needs v. root causes of needs and orientation toward prioritizing community in life values and choices are also critical components to direct service preparation.

Skills

Participation in direct service requires a particular set of skills to be as successful as possible in meeting the immediate needs of issues of public concern. Additionally, participation in direct service allows students to cultivate additional skills. Both will be discussed in this section.

Direct service participation often involves contact with people or places being served. Many of these activities serve vulnerable populations such as racial or ethnic minorities, children, elderly, socioeconomically disadvantaged, underinsured, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, or those with certain medical conditions. Because

students will be interacting with sensitive and immediate needs, a particular set of skills is important to ensure the highest level of effectiveness when working in communities. Many institutions of higher education have implemented student training modules to provide them with the essential skillset for engaging with the community in direct service (Astin & Sax, 1998). One example of this is the University of Louisville. Before engaging in direct service as mentors or tutors with local k-12 youth, students complete a series of eight training modules to equip them with the skills needed to competently interact with the community as representatives of the university. These skills include but are not limited to exploring the student's own assumptions and expectations about the experience, preparing an open mind that is ready to observe and learn, exploring considerations related to cultural sensitivity, completing relevant research on the need(s) being addressed, time management, understanding the student's role as a representative of the institution, verbal communication, cultural awareness, dependability, compassion, and flexibility (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2005). In recent years, institutions of higher education have significantly stepped up efforts to prepare students for direct service experiences to mitigate risk and unintended consequences to the community and institution (McKenna & Rizzo, 1999).

Engagement in direct service has also been shown to have both "direct" and "indirect" effects on post college transferable skills. For example, students that participate in direct service report greater understanding of community problems (Astin & Sax, 1998; Borden, 2007; Markus et al., 1993), increases in the belief they can make a difference in the community (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Ericson, 2011; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Simons & Cleary, 2005), greater commitment to future community

service (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Markus et al., 1993; McCarthy & Tucker, 2002; McKenna & Rizzo, 1999; Moely, McFarland, Miron, Mercer, & Ilustre, 2002; Porter & Monard, 2001), and plans to become involved in service-related careers (Markus et al., 1993; Simons & Cleary, 2005; Tonkin & Quiroga, 2004). Additionally, direct service participation directly influences the development of important life skills, such as leadership ability, social self-confidence, critical thinking, and conflict resolution. Finally, there are also unique positive effects on academic development, including knowledge gained, grades earned, degrees sought after, and time devoted to academic endeavors (Astin & Sax, 1998).

Attributes

A 1994 study by Giles & Eyler discovered that while curricular service-learning has been associated with cognitive learning outcomes, co-curricular service, often direct service, is linked to aspects of personal development such as identity exploration and social responsibility (Giles & Eyler, 1994; Markus, Howard & King, 1993; Kezar & Rhoads, 2001).

Students who participate in the direct service pathway tend to have some common attributes such as satisfaction in interacting directly with the communities or places they are looking to serve; fulfillment in seeing the immediate outcome(s) of their service; preference to connect directly with organizations and people; ability/desire to communicate with others from differing backgrounds, abilities, and situations; interest in learning the needs/issue areas being addressed; have a team-player mentality; willingness to learn; and a sense of humility and grace (Cravens, 2010).

In a longitudinal study conducted in 2004, researchers surveyed two cohorts of students at 23 institutions who participated in the same structured program. Participants

completed at least 10 hours of direct service and reflection every week for four years. By graduation, each student had participated in a minimum of 1,680 hours of service. Study results indicated that students experienced significant increases in the value they assigned to doing direct service, their development of intercultural attributes, their overall sense of accomplishment, sensitivity to social issues, and commitment to community concerns after college (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004). Another study involving college students participating in co-curricular direct service alternative break programs discovered students had significant attribute increases in developing autonomy and maturing interpersonal relationships (Armstrong, 2006).

A model BreakAway, an organization that trains universities to create high-impact alternative break experiences, developed and promotes is the Active Citizen Continuum (BreakAway, 2014). This framework illustrates how a student can move along a continuum from a member of the community, not concerned with their role in societal problems to an active citizen, where community has become a priority in that person's core values and life choices. It further demonstrates how an entry-level experience within the direct service pathway can lead to a deeper, lifelong commitment to active engagement.

Reflection is a critical attribute of students engaging in direct service. Reflection is an exercise in critical thinking about a service experience through meaningful writing, creative expression, and/or discussion. It's not the experience of volunteering itself that creates meaning and understanding, it's the critical reflection. Reflective practice is an attribute students can gain from direct service experiences that can act as a foundational practice for the rest of their lives (Astin, 1977).

Social Impact/ Prospective Change by Engaged Students

The 2020s continue to face numerous social issues including unemployment, poverty and hunger, lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, homelessness, record inflation, food shortages, and environmental degradation (Income, 2020; The State, 2020; U.S. Bureau, 2020). The unemployment rate in June of 2021 was at 5.9%, which represents 12 million individuals (U.S. Bureau, 2021). The poverty rate in 2021 was 11.4%, which equates to 29 million people and 20% of America's children living in poverty (U.S. Census, 2020). In January of 2020, there were 580,466 individuals who were experiencing housing insecurity, which equates to 19 individuals for every 10,000 in the U.S. population (U.S. Census, 2020). Internationally, there are 2.4 billion (approximately 7.1 billion total world population) people who live on less than \$2 (U.S. dollars) a day according to the World Bank (The World, n.d.). According to the State of the World 2010, produced by the Worldwatch Institute, the rapid rate of the world's consumerism is putting the world on a disastrous course with the environment (Worldwatch, 2010).

Direct service can be used to address the immediate needs of these social challenges (Peterson, 2009). Students in higher education institutions can play a unique role in addressing these concerns (Campus Compact, 2012, 2011; Association, 2012). Many of higher education's writers and researchers, past and present, have declared that a primary goal of higher education is to develop socially-responsible graduates who contribute meaningfully to social change (Bingle & Hatcher, 2002; Bingle, Studer, Wilson, Clayton, & Steinberg, 2011; Chambers, 2009; Jones & Abes, 2004; McCarthy & Tucker, 2002; Ramaley, 2014). Social impact occurs as a result of direct service. Often

times, we are critical of direct service because of its perception of being a simple band-aid or subpar dam holding back deeply-rooted social issues. The issues can be complex and exacerbated by red tape and policy. However, there are folks whose immediate needs must be met urgently. Leveraging the additional time and resources that is afforded by most college students allows them to leverage their privilege to support local communities in addressing these immediate needs.

Finally, direct service is one of the few pathways that allows the participant to see immediate results from their efforts. Students have the opportunity to make immediate change such as feeding mouths, housing individuals, supporting immediate legal needs of marginalized communities, planting trees, etc. This type of volunteerism that provides an immediate result is exciting and can be the catalyst for a student to create more long-term solutions to community needs. Direct service can be a form of "gateway drug" into other forms of social change. An example of this phenomenon is the Executive Director of O-Town Kitchen, Nestor Robles. Nestor was a student at Weber State University in Ogden Utah. Nestor enrolled (knowingly) in a community engagement-designated course. As part of the course, Nestor completed direct service volunteerism at Youth Impact. Nestor witnessed a lot of fruit being wasted as it would rot before people had a chance to eat it. His direct service reflections led him to find solutions to his observations by establishing a nonprofit organization that created preservatives and jellies using expiring fruit. He employs victims of domestic violence and previously incarcerated individuals, providing them with skills, work history, and confidence. Nestor's story illustrates this phenomenon and role direct service plays in putting students on a trajectory to find more long-term solutions to community needs

and play an active role in addressing them for the rest of their lives. In this way, direct service leads students to the type of high-impact experiences Jacoby (1996) defines as students becoming agents of change in their current and future communities

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