Entrepreneurship Education – Academic Acceptance and Effective Classroom Strategies and Methodologies Introduction to the Special Issue

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Successful academic entrepreneurship programs create and perpetuate an environment that fosters student deep thinking, experimentation, observation, and reflection as a means of instigating creativity and action into economic and program development. To support this environment, educational focus must be broad and include entrepreneurial orientation in a variety of settings including new venture creation, social stewardship, family business, government operations, and corporate endeavors. To this end, the goal for any learning institution should be to create a student entrepreneurial mindset and spirit.

This special issue of The American Journal of Entrepreneurship amplifies this goal by offering a broad, interdisciplinary dialogue with an emphasis on outlining and defining the challenges of instructing entrepreneurship as a formal academic discipline as well as highlighting effective classroom pedagogy. As such, our purpose as guest editors was to add to the entrepreneurship literature by soliciting and managing the review of empirical and conceptual papers, and book and article reviews, from various disciplines, including business administration, engineering, liberal arts, science, mathematics, and performing arts. We hope our selections achieve our purpose.

We selected three papers for this special issue:

The first paper, submitted by Lane Perry, Robert Lahm, Annika Shauer, and Zachary Rumble, *The Crossroads of Social Entrepreneurship, Community Engagement, and Learning Communities,* highlights and describes an interdisciplinary model for teaching social entrepreneurship to first year university students.

Called the RELC (Ripple Effect Learning Community) program, it is comprised of a pre-semester retreat, a fall and spring community engagement project, as well as curricular forms of instruction. The overall intent of the course is to expose students to a highly individualized service learning environment as well as basic social entrepreneurship concepts and practices. Student feedback on the program has been positive and indicative of a transformational experience.

The second paper, submitted by James Anthony Swaim, Mark S. Hiatt, and Robin Cheramie, *Developing an Entrepreneurship Major and Minor: One University's Story,* summarizes the development of a entrepreneurship degree major and minor through the actions and initiative of a business department in a major public university. Using a case analysis format, the article details the research, preparation, and course development of the two separate degree programs prior to their submission for approval at the state board level. It is the authors' intent that the experiences presented in this article will assist other academic institutions in their similar endeavors.

The final paper, submitted by Anirban Ray, Colleen Reilly, and Jeremy Tirrell, *Crossing Boundaries and Redefining Roles: Humanists as Academic Entrepreneurs,* presents the perspective of developing a hybrid model of entrepreneurship that emphasizes the development of academic projects by the faculty in humanities departments. In a traditional sense, public universities provide less established support for such endeavors in non-business departments, requiring humanities faculty to actively search out resources from throughout their campuses. This submission presents two pilot entrepreneurial projects that were incorporated into professional and technical writing internships and courses. This hybrid model shows that humanities faculty can develop alternate roles and work through many organizational barriers to create feasible academic entrepreneurial ventures.

We would like to sincerely thank the authors who submitted their research to us for this special issue as well as our reviewers for their comments, suggestions, and guidance.

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The Crossroads of Social Entrepreneurship, Community Engagement, and Learning Communities

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Abstract

This paper describes an emerging interdisciplinary model of instructional delivery for first-year students at a regionally-accredited public university located in western North Carolina. This emerging interdisciplinary model is comprised of a pre-semester engagement retreat, a fall and spring community engagement project, and curricular components linked by the common themes of social change and making a difference through one's vocation and social contributions. Students are exposed to individualized service learning and engagement activities, as well as larger-scale social entrepreneurship concepts via a course by this same title. The emerging model has been branded as the Ripple Effect Learning Community (RELC) and is presented as one that may be transferable to other institutions. When combined with critical reflection, the interdisciplinary nature of the RELC prepares students to identify what they truly love about the world (e.g., a sense of individual spirituality in the vein of Hermann Hesse) and ultimately become empowered change agents themselves. Excerpts of student feedback capturing overarching themes are provided, indicating that the RELC experience has been transformative for many.

Introduction

Scholars may aid in creating increased social impact through applied research, which "can further the work of practitioners and develop new tools and innovations for the good of society" (Brock & Kim, 2011, p. 5). Accordingly, an interdisciplinary instructional model branded as the Ripple Effect Learning Community (RELC) is presented here as one that may be transferable to other institutions (or to other levels of education). The setting in which this model has been developed and deployed is a regionally accredited public university located in western North Carolina (and the community in which it serves) with a population of approximately 10,000 students.

This paper is intended to contribute to an emergent field and provide other educators with ideas for new approaches to pedagogy and further research. As of this writing, the target audience for RELC has been first-year undergraduate students. Although the scope of RELC extends well beyond a single seminar, as a general observation those who participate in a first-year seminar experience "are more likely to report that their campus is a supportive environment" (Brownell & Swaner, 2009, p. 27). The RELC offers its students a wide array of impactful experiences, from the Pre-Semester Retreat, to the Community Engagement Project, to the curricular components, each driven by the process of critical reflection. For our students, initial feedback suggests the RELC model may affect reflective thinking and community service involvement preferences, with additional positive influence on grade point average and retention. There are many first-year programs (Elnagar, Perry, & O'Steen, 2011; Heiselt & Briley, 2010; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008) that feature components within the RELC that achieve similar results for their students, but what does this experience offer to its students that is unique and critically important for their development as individuals, global citizens, and social entrepreneurs? When students have the opportunity to dive deep and intensively rally around a cause, topic, or curriculum that inspires and interests them, we believe that we can create the conditions for students to embark on a lifelong journey to impart change upon their world.

The Crossroads of Social Entrepreneurship, Community Engagement, and Learning Communities

Both more advanced undergraduate and graduate students have expressed an interest in pursuing similar activities (evidence which, albeit anecdotal, seems encouraging). The RELC learning platform also exposes students to individualized service learning and community engagement activities, as well as larger-scale social entrepreneurship concepts, in the form of a recognized Service Learning Course (SLC).

Social Entrepreneurship: A Pedagogical Opportunity

As a practice and academic discipline, social entrepreneurship is emerging, and still nascent (Enos, 2015). Additionally, education in social entrepreneurship also suffers "from a lack of a clear theorizing" (Pache & Chowdhury, 2012, p. 494). A meta-analysis of scholarly literature conducted by Hill, Kothari and Shea (2010) found that one of the challenges for the discipline is that "there is not yet a consistent and accepted definition of social entrepreneurship" (p. 6). Yet, the need for social entrepreneurs (and for the emergence of an academic discipline to support their development) is clear:

> Societies around the world are facing significant social problems for which they often do not have cost-effective solutions. They also face uncertainty and rapid changes (in everything from technology to migrating populations) that lead to new, complex, and shifting problems, and open the door to new approaches to solutions. (Zeyen et al., 2013, p. 90)

While the definitions are varied (Ascigil, 2012; Bacq & Janssen, 2011; Dacin, Dacin, & Matear, 2010), relative to shaping our understanding of what we mean when discussing social entrepreneurship is Dees' (2001) conceptualization of social entrepreneurs as social sector change agents. These individuals utilize best practices from business to address social or community challenges. Dees goes on to say that they utilize a framework that demands a mission to create and sustain social value, pursue new opportunities to serve the mission, engage in a process of learning and adaptation, think and solve beyond available resources, and exhibit high accountability to the outcomes created and the constituencies served. These

components are the key elements that are articulated and applied to frame the being of the social

entrepreneur and the meaning of social entrepreneurship.

To address the financial aspects of persistent social problems, the emerging discipline of social-

entrepreneurship has developed strategies and constructs such as impact investing (i.e., investments made

into companies with the primary purpose of generating a measurable, valuable, and beneficial impact on a

societal, communal, or environmental issue in conjunction with a financial return). For further explanation

see http://www.partnersglobal.org/news/impact-investing-for-sustainable-development) and social-

innovation processes (Geobey, Westley, & Weber, 2012; Moore, Westley, & Brodhead, 2012). Social

entrepreneurs and investors who support them typically seek more than financial returns via a (TBL) "Triple

Bottom Line" (Elkington, 2006, p. 523). As observed by Elkington (who originally coined this term), the "TBL

concept basically expresses the fact that companies and other organizations create value in multiple

dimensions" (p. 523). Certain dimensions of value creation have been difficult to calculate (and predictably

will remain so) because (Geobey et al., 2012, p. 154) "measuring performance outputs such as value to

society is laden with intangible characteristics" (Geobey et al., 2012, p. 154). Traditional for-profit

entrepreneurs may face an analogous challenge when attempting to measure (for purposes of business

valuation, for instance) customer goodwill or brand reputation.

According to an Ashoka publication entitled *Social Entrepreneurship Education Handbook*,

developing student competencies "will depend on the creation of effective pedagogies and methodologies

to ensure results" (Brock & Kim, 2011, p. 5). While social entrepreneurship is one approach to developing

such pedagogies and methodologies, it also presents an opportunity to incorporate the kind of community

engagement and service-learning activities that result in transformative learning experiences as well as

creating an impact on whole communities of stakeholders.

The RELC Model-Intent

As observed by Kinsella and Wood (2014), as universities increase their efforts to respond to issues in communities and reinforce social responsibility, course offerings that allow students to learn by applying "theory to practice are becoming popular" (p. 36). At its core the RELC is meant to engage first-year students in a year-long, collective academic experience that challenges participants to determine a personal response to the following question: "What do you care enough about, to do something about in this world?" The answer to this question is not an easy one for many students who have come to the university setting without a defined major or vocation in mind, but it is an important one.
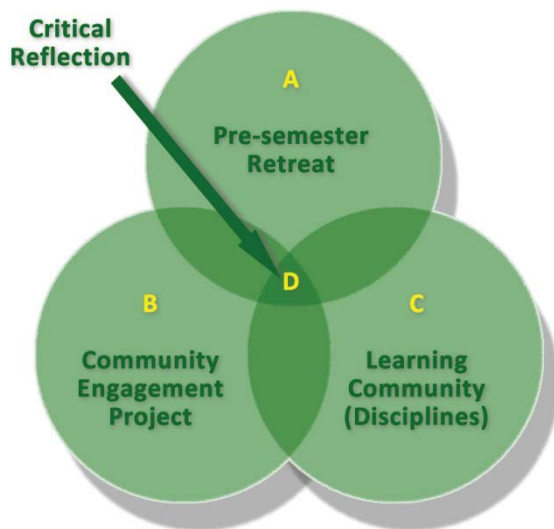
The first comprehensive study into the workforce purpose index found that roughly 28% of the 150 million strong United States workforce identifies "the role of work in their lives primarily as a source of personal fulfillment and a way to help others" (Hurst & Tavis, 2015, p. 3). Hurst and Tavis identify that those employees who consider their work as having a larger purpose as being more likely to be leaders, more likely to seek out professional growth and development opportunities, and more likely to experience or view their work as making an impact. The Hurst and Tavis investigation calls attention to the reality that much like their predecessors, the graduates of today are looking for work that has a larger purpose, clearer connection to social change, and greater potential for personal fulfillment. If the entering employees of today are demanding meaningful employment, then it is important that students of today have the opportunity to challenge and address the alignment between sustainable business practices and social issues. Based on these findings, the impetus for efforts to develop the RELC model was to provide a space where students are encouraged to grapple with their interpretation of their own purpose. The primary intention is not that they become better, more purpose-oriented members of a workforce (Hurst & Tavis, 2015), but to provide a clearer understanding of 'who' they are. The RELC intentionally places students outside of their comfort zone, and urges them to learn to be critically reflective, to develop an acumen for social entrepreneurship and social justice, and ultimately to become better versions of themselves.

Components Of An Interdisciplinary RELC Model

The RELC for first-year students at Western Carolina University (WCU) was founded in 2013 on an interdisciplinary model that incorporates common themes of social change, social justice, and social entrepreneurship. The project is funded by an award from the Bringing Theory to Practice grant program through AAC&U. As shown in Figure 1, below, RELC is comprised of a pre-semester engagement retreat, Fall and Spring community engagement projects, and curricular components, with critical reflection critical reflection at its core. The interdisciplinary nature of the RELC prepares students to identify what they truly love about the world (e.g., a sense of individual spirituality in the vein of Hermann Hesse) and ultimately become empowered change agents themselves.

Figure 1

An interdisciplinary model for the Ripple Effect Learning Community (RELC).

Pre-Semester Leadership Engagement Retreat (A)

The pre-semester leadership engagement retreat portion of the RELC model is designed to introduce participants to one another, the campus culture, ideas on service, community engagement, servant-leadership, and ultimately promotes group cohesion. Active and collaborative learning opportunities and dialogue set the tone for the academic year. Tinto (1988) has identified the first six weeks of a student's transition from secondary to higher education as a pivotal period for their retention and "that effective *retention* and the *involvement* of individuals in the social and intellectual life of the college are *one and the same*" (p. 453, emphasis added). Eich (2008) identified leadership-focused retreats as a key way to facilitate self-discovery, to set the tone for curriculum that focuses on a "journey inward," and has a positive influence on students' confidence as a student (Elnagar et al., 2011).

Community Engagement Project (B)

A community engagement project serves to ground a collaborative and sustainable partnership with the local community via new and ongoing partnership relationships, whereby a relevant issue is directly addressed. It is important to note that these relationships are purposely cultivated and maintained through the offices of a Center for Service Learning that is supported by the institution. Certainly, any university may pursue such relationships on an ad hoc basis, but there are several advantages of an

established center for such purposes (discussed in another section below). This project-based approach to teaching and learning can help students develop problem solving skills, collaboration skills, and make connections across disciplines and educative experiences (Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Perry, 2011).

Community-based projects serve as incubators for experiences salient to the Learning Community curricula. The concentrated focus on connecting out-of-class experiences and community-based projects with the academic curricula brings life to the course content and greater relevance to the experience by way of critical reflection. This component of the RELC experience is intended to serve as the field experience for students to test concepts of social entrepreneurship, to provide a moral context for the cohort, and to develop more informed, complex questions and discussion.

Learning Communities (C)

Learning communities, defined as two or more courses linked by a common theme and/or learning outcomes, have consistently been identified as sources for integrated academic and social experiences, increased academic performance, positive perceptions of the college environment, and personal development (Zhao & Kuh, 2004). The intentionality of the integrated connections is an imperative with regard to student retention (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). From a teaching and learning standpoint, learning communities serve as bonding agents for faculty who are interested in integrating and synthesizing content in an applied and interdisciplinary way. The RELC consisted of two Liberal Studies courses (one focused on Social Entrepreneurship and one focused on Social Justice), one First-Year Experience transition course, and one Leadership Minor course.

Critical Reflection (D)

For learnings to imbue meaning and perspective, students must not only engage in experiences, but should also take time to reflect upon them (Perry, Stoner, & Tarrant, 2012). As such the critical reflection component of the RELC model provides the context whereby students can integrate learning across courses and grapple with bigger questions that can provide deeper understanding and wider relevance to course content (Kuh, 2008). As an educative activity for learners "reflection and critical reflection are processes

that create opportunities to stop and think, question, and discuss experiences" (Perry et al., 2012, p. 683),

ultimately leading to a more appropriate restart in the form of future action.

Course Content

An integral aspect of the RELC model is the academic content which primarily focuses on the tenets of

social entrepreneurship theory and practice. These may also be extended to components of social justice,

concern for the environment, and other pressing problems. It is the connection of these constructs that

seeks to frame students' thinking in three ways:

1. To provide opportunities to explore and examine 'self' through readings, discussions, experiences,

   and reflection.

2. To then compare that worldview and perspective with the realities, challenges, and opportunities

   that exist within communities and the world and see where there might be a fit between the two.

3. To realize that there are established processes (models) for addressing social issues and challenges

   in a way that is sustainability, financially viable, and mutually beneficial for those involved and

   impacted.

Social entrepreneurs barter with the currency of innovative solutions to communities' most pressing

social problems with a scalable capacity for wide-spread change ("Ashoka innovators for the public: About

us"). This process typically includes changing a system itself and through the creative destruction and

rebuilding of the system move communities in different directions (Ziegler, 2010). Interestingly, the cases

associated with effective social entrepreneurship endeavors and the diffusion of ideas, focus on three key

factors: the idea, the social entrepreneur, and the system or environment where it all exists (Bornstein,

2004; O'Steen & Perry, 2012). While most first-year students enrolled in the RELC do not 'creatively

destroy' or 'rebuild' any particular system associated with a novel or innovative idea, they do start to

grapple with the processes, theories, and experiences associated with social entrepreneurship and social

entrepreneurs.

December 9

Through the facilitation and analysis of dozens of international and domestic case studies of social entrepreneurs, Bornstein (2004) illuminated six qualities that were associated with those who sought to not only implement an idea and vision, but to catalyze a shift in a field, industry, or societal issue. These qualities were: A willingness to self-correct; to share credit; to break free of established structures; to cross disciplinary boundaries; to work quietly; and to possess a strong ethical impetus. Through the social entrepreneurship course curriculum, it is these concepts that we attempt to present, discuss, and ultimately engage students with the content. Case studies from Bornstein's (2004) text and community engagement projects in conjunction with associated relevant theories, e.g., diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 2003), the golden circle (Sinek, 2010), hero's journey (Campbell, 1949), team dynamics (Tuckman, 1965), and other theories of social entrepreneurship. These exemplars and others serve as the resources used to discuss and experience firsthand the process of social change and development (Bhowmick, 2011; Brower, 2011; Zhang & Swanson, 2014).

Through a social justice course there is a focus on justice and its opposite – injustice. In it, students identify ways in which American society generally, and criminal justice agencies in particular, strive to be just and eradicate injustice. We also show ways in which both sometimes fall short of our ideals of justice, remaining and even at times reinforcing injustices. Social justice can be defined in many ways. One definition is focused on "promoting a just society by challenging injustice and valuing diversity." It exists when "all people share a common humanity and therefore have a right to equitable treatment, support for their human rights, and a fair allocation of community resources" ("Social Justice," 2006). In conditions of social justice, people are "not to be discriminated against, nor their welfare and well-being constrained or prejudiced on the basis of gender, sexuality, religion, political affiliations, age, race, belief, disability, location, social class, socioeconomic circumstance, or other characteristic of background or group members" ("Social Justice," 2006).

To this end, students in this social justice oriented course will examine the social construction of differences for the aforementioned groups before evaluating how laws have been used to both oppress and restore each minority group towards the end of achieving social justice. Success is determined when students leave the course with an understanding of both the principles of social justice and how they can be (or structure and build the infrastructure) the change they wish to see in a more just world.

High-Impact Practices

In addition to a robust interdisciplinary design centering on social change, the RELC also employs the High-Impact Educational Practices of Learning Communities and Service Learning as First-Year Experiences (Kuh, 2008). From nearly a decade of National Survey of Student Engagement data, high-impact practices have been demonstrated to reliably increase the level of student engagement, retention, and success in higher education settings (Kuh, 2008). Student engagement is defined by the "time and energy students invest in educationally purposeful activities and the effort institutions devote to using effective educational practices" for the purpose of generating high-quality learning (Kuh et al., 2008, p. 542).

Educationally purposeful activities include working with classmates outside of class, participation in a community engagement project, and having discussions with faculty, staff, and advisors. Involvement in educationally purposeful activities among first-year students has been demonstrated to exert a positive effect on persistence, or retention (Tinto, 1988, 2006-2007), into the second year of college (Kuh et al., 2008). Civic leadership, charitable giving, and overall political engagement have been previously identified "as being more common among individuals who had participated in service-learning compared to those who had not" (Wilder, Berle, Knauft, & Brackmann, 2012, p. 126; citing Astin et al, 2006).

From decades of research on student engagement, it is advised that college students participate in at least two high-impact practices over the course of their undergraduate career (Brownell & Swaner, 2009) and that ideally they will participate in at least one per year (Finely & McNair, 2013). The RELC provides students with the opportunity to engage simultaneously in two high-impact practices in their first year of

study. The intentional combination of these two practices into one (intentionally richer) initiative can be a highly effective means of achieving positive outcomes for persistence, performance, and learning for students (Brownell & Swaner, 2009).

Service Learning

"Service learning is an ideal activity to pair with other high-impact activities to lead to even greater gains for students," due to its integrative, adaptive capacity (Brownell & Swaner, 2009, p. 30). According to Jenkins and Sheehey (2011):

> Service-learning allows students the opportunity to practice critical thinking skills and apply learning in real-world settings, while meeting authentic needs in communities. Service-learning presents students with real-world problems to confront, alternatives to consider, and solutions to find. Service-learning challenges students to work collegially, communicate successfully, and acquire and exercise new skills (p. 52).

Learning communities can create prolonged opportunities for students to engage in service learning and critically reflect on those experiences in a structured classroom environment (Eaton, MacGregor, & Schoem, 1993). Further, "service-learning opportunities within the classroom are now encouraged so that students can practice the skills they are learning and apply them to real situations in their local community" (Kinsella & Wood, 2014, p. 36).

Through integrating service learning into the curricula, RELC faculty have the opportunity to create vital out-of-class learning experiences through which their students receive the opportunity to apply in-class learning to real-world problems. This particular opportunity works both ways. Reciprocally, the out-of-class experiences begin to shape and inform the in-class discussions and testing/re-testing of concepts, theories, and individual perspectives (e.g., meaning-making, perspective affirmation, perspective

The Crossroads of Social Entrepreneurship, Community Engagement, and Learning Communities

transformation, etc.). This approach to applying service-learning pedagogy has been shown effective in numerous studies over the past twenty years (Eyler, Giles, Stenson & Gray, 2001; Perry, 2011).

Ash and Clayton's (2009) conceptual framework for service learning posits that service learning is achieved as a result of the intentional combination of relevant service, academic material, and critical reflection (Figure 2 depicts their original work):

Figure 2

A Conceptual Framework for Service Learning (and Role of Reflection)
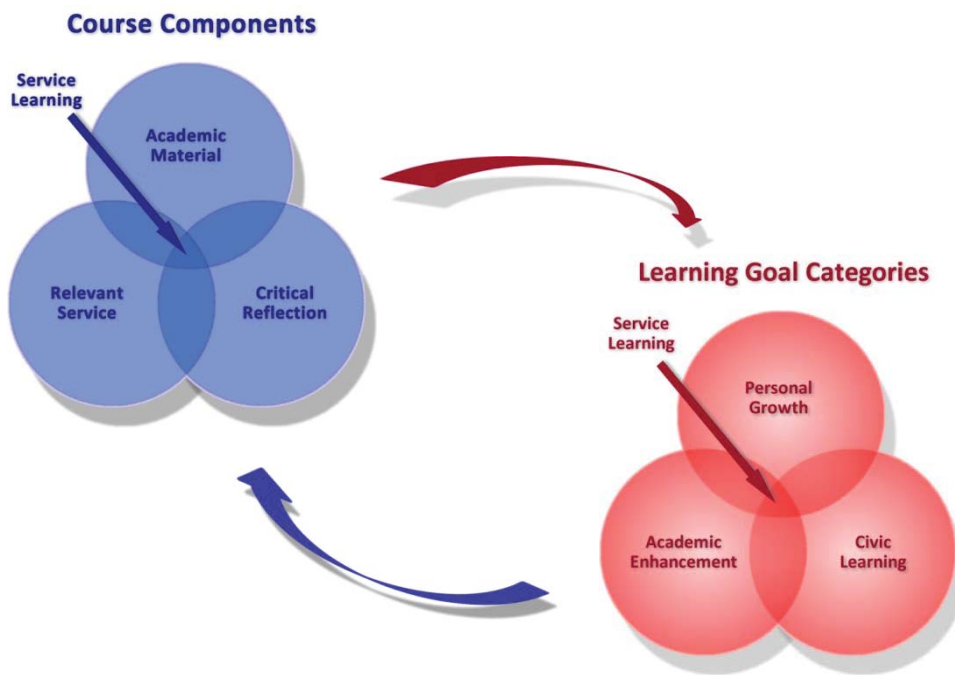
A conceptual framework for Service Learning and the role of reflection, redrawn with flow modified based on Ash & Clayton (2009, p. 29).

These three components (Figure 2) that constitute service learning have emerged in the literature consistently. One widely accepted definition of service learning is as follows: "Service learning is a form of experiential education where learning occurs through a cycle of action and reflection as students work with others through a process of applying what they are learning to community problems and, at the same time, reflecting upon their experience as they seek to achieve real objectives for the community and deeper understanding and skills for themselves" (J. Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 7).

December 13

Critical reflection generates, deepens, and documents learning (Ash & Clayton, 2009) and helps students draw connections between their studies and personal experiences – knowledge and perspective that can then be used to solve real-world problems at the community level and across the globe. Through participation in service learning, students develop a sense of civic responsibility to engage themselves in the community and give back to it (Lichtenstein, 2005). Service learning also helps students achieve gains in their moral reasoning and fosters a social justice mindset (Brownell & Swaner, 2009), in which students strive to affect change in the world and to right the wrongs they observe in it through information, action, and reflection.

Center for Service Learning Advantages (vs. Ad Hoc Approach)

As introduced above, relationships with community partners can be formed and maintained on an ad hoc basis. However, doing so through an established "Center" for service learning provides several advantages. A review of 147 Carnegie-classified community engagement institutions, Welch and Saltmarsh (2013) identified the complex and multi-faceted functions of these spaces (i.e., Centers) to include: partnership cultivation and management, programming for student, staff, and faculty development, measuring and monitoring impacts associated with community engagement, and a source for distributing funding and resources to advance the engagement missions of these institutions. One of the strongest roles of a Center is to support collaborative and sustainable relationships and partnerships. Students, staff, and faculty are inherently transient, however. When these individuals move through institutions it is important to have a consistent anchor. In this model, Centers that are responsible for managing the engagement portfolio of institutions, to include partnerships and community relations, can serve as familiar anchors to the aforementioned populations (Welch & Saltmarsh, 2013).

Additionally, a Center (as suggested by the organizational label) can begin to build a public identity as an entity and official outreach arm for an institution. Relationships with community partners (as facilitated by such a Center) have, in effect, a home base. As an entity, a Center can also serve as the central hub for the celebration of achievement, marshaling of resources, and collection of research (traditional) as well as curating community events (Welch & Saltmarsh, 2013). The responsibility for all community engagement must not end with a specific center (as compared to reaching across a campus and its constituent communities), but it is important to have a clear place to start. Considering committed partners are important to the success of the student projects facilitated within the RELC program, and committed RELC students are important to the local organizations, the established Center for Service Learning in this instance helps maintain congruence between partners, students, and faculty. This helps to establish replicable and repeatable projects that can have a longer-term impact than which could be achieved in a single semester by a single group of students (where the wheel must be reinvented all over again in a subsequent semester).

Learning Communities

Students who participate in a learning community typically are enrolled in two or more "linked" courses (e.g., courses connected by learning outcomes, professors with pedagogical buy-in, and shared assignments from different perspectives) that often share a common academic theme and feature close, collaborative work with peers and professors (Kuh, 2008). Learning communities promote a very high degree of social and academic involvement for participating students, ask that students integrate learning across courses, and then apply that learning to tackling 'big questions' that matter beyond the classroom (Kuh, 2008; Lichtenstein, 2005). Learning communities have been shown to achieve the outcomes typically associated with high-impact practices, including higher retention rates (Lichtenstein, 2005), higher grade point average (Lichtenstein, 2005; Zhao & Kuh, 2004), high density of educationally purposeful activities (Zhao & Kuh, 2004), and gains in personal, social, and cognitive development (Lichtenstein, 2005; Zhao & Kuh, 2004).

Learning communities also assist students greatly with their transition to college, helping them form their out-of-class social groups, build a sense of community, and ultimately reduce withdrawal rates (Lichtenstein, 2005). In addition to these critical outcomes, students in learning communities report greater overall satisfaction with their college experience (Zhao & Kuh, 2004).

Developing Themes Emerging from Initial Feedback

Student engagement is vital to first-year student success and retention (Kuh, 2008; Tinto, 1988, 2006-2007). The RELC project was meant to focus high impact practices (service-learning and learning communities) on first-year learners. The primary outcomes of interest to the framers of the RELC model were conceptualized as follows: (impacting) first-to-second-year student retention, critical reflection, preference in type of community engagement involvement, and grade point average. At this point in time, sentiments that the model is working is based on informal feedback, which does not support much more than anecdotal conclusions. However, administrators and students appear to regard the initial efforts to develop and deploy the model as a success, and these reactions support the continuance of the RELC program even after the BtTP grant from AAC&U has been exhausted.

Some initial student feedback pertaining to the RELC project was collected through focus groups, course related artifacts (e.g., individual reflection and discussion boards, group presentations, projects, and assignments, etc.), and other informal observations. As we go forward, we wish to monitor critical reflection, community service preferences, and personal development.

Four questions are (and will remain) of interest in attempts to discern the effectiveness of the RELC model:

1. What did the student learn?
2. How did she/he learn it?
3. Why does it matter?
4. What will the student do in light of the learning experience?

As indicated by exemplars illustrated in Figure 3, students expressed a clear alignment with the intended outcomes of the RELC and specifically recognized their personal development in a clarification of their sense of direction and personal values and how that sense of self relates to social and personal responsibilities (e.g., caring for others/community, and group/team dynamics).

Figure 3

Developing Themes from Initial Feedback

Strengthened sense of self and perspective. **Clarified sense of purpose and personal motivation.**	*"The processes I attained from the Ripple Effect class helped strengthen myself and my ideas of the world around me. The Ripple Effect made it possible for a conversation in Germany to give me my personal drive, and my identification of a personal 'why.'"*
Understanding of personal potential, broadened horizons. **Positive impact her actions can have on others.** **Importance of "paying it forward."** **Valuable relationships formed.**	*"Being a part of the Ripple Effect experience has broadened my horizons of what I am capable of. It has opened my eyes to the opportunities that I have and the help that I am able to provide for others. Learning to "pay it forward" has benefitted me as well as others that I am doing a favor for. Many great relationships were formed that mean a lot to me and that I can count on for the rest of college."*
Learned strategies for achieving success in college. **Formed valuable connections for helping her set and fulfill her personal goals.**	*"The Ripple Effect has given me the tools to be a successful university student. Through the program, I was given the opportunity that most first year students were not. I was immediately immersed with different faculty and organizations that could help me to identify and reach my potential goals."*

RELC program student feedback suggesting developing themes.

Conclusion

Continuance of the RELC program at our institution suggests the following: the model has gained administrative support, students' reaction is favorable, community partners are appreciative, and that formalized future research may be appropriate to more definitively compare these particular outcomes associated with RELC cohorts, such as by establishing a control group to determine the influence that the intentional combining of two high impact practices (service-learning and learning communities) can have on a specified treatment group. Should the RELC model be adopted at one or more other institutions, this would also suggest the possibility of other research opportunities spanning multiple institutions.

There is something consistently engaging about getting a group of like-minded individuals from a range of different backgrounds and taking them on an intensive exploration through difficult concepts and uncharted territory, and as discussed have them critically reflect (Ash & Clayton, 2009; Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Kember et al., 2000). When those affective challenges (e.g., worldview, perspective, or values that are challenged) and cognitive challenges (e.g., academic content coming into conflict with what a student believes to be true) seem insurmountable, there is a powerful opportunity for learning to occur.

In order to address the needs of the community at large, we (educators) owe it to our students and to the world they will function in to equip our future leaders with the vision, experiences, and passion necessary to actualize their dreams for true social change and advancements for social justice. Beyond these loftier expectations, one aspect of service learning that immediately resonates with students (and their sponsors, e.g., parents underwriting the cost of a college education) is the prospect of increased employability via students who have learned to be engaged (Bourner & Millican, 2011; Tower & Broadbent, 2011). The RELC may offer a transferable model that has the potential to achieve success in a range of educational settings and institutional varieties in order to provide students with the opportunity to discover what they truly care about in this world and an environment that empowers them as change agents over the course of impending professional and personal pursuits.

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