

Book Review

Engaging Departments: Moving Faculty Culture From Private to Public, Individual to Collective Focus for the Common Good

Kevin Kecskes, Editor (Jossey-Bass, 2006)

Review by

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Planning a university service learning program without reading *Engaging Departments: Moving Faculty Culture From Private to Public, Individual to Collective Focus for the Common Good* is like starting to build a house with no tools or blueprints. And service learning programs like the ones described in this book can inspire SoTL projects on service learning.

Once the reader gets past the lengthy and cumbersome title, a wealth of real experiences of initiating and implementing service programs throughout the country is available. Institutions from Portland to Philadelphia, from Los Angeles to Birmingham have engaged in life changing programs as part of the university curriculum and their founders, developers and evaluators have written clear, concise and candid explanations about those programs.

Alabama's Samford University's development of the Birmingham Area Debate League is a vastly different experience from the Orange Coast Community College geology student whose geology display became a popular and must see stop in a southern California soup kitchen. Both met needs of students and the community albeit in completely different ways. As I read the myriad ways in which participants in service learning programs had affected and been affected by their communities, I marveled that earlier graduates could acquire degrees without such an experience. Surely this generation is richer for the experience.

The four-part book begins by giving readers a broad understanding of why an institution would be interested in such a program. It also outlines the characteristics of a department which truly is engaged, including clarification as to how a program might be designed, implemented and assessed.

The second part is divided into two sections; the first discussing large scale change and the second focusing on long term commitment, both of which are essential to success. Within each of those sections are multiple, detailed and informative case studies which provide clear examples of how departments developed and experienced their programs.

Kevin Kecskes, the book's editor is Director of Community-University Partnerships at Portland State University . In addition to his own sharing of experiences, he has

included reports from others at Portland State University such as Susan Agre-Kippenhan and Elisabeth Charman from the university's art department.

Kecskes' own broad and extensive background shines through in the editing as in the third section he includes cases ranging from Case Western Reserve University's Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing to UCLA's Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies, two vastly different experiences. Focusing on how institutions intent on developing such programs must behave to foster and encourage engagement among and between faculty, students and community, this section focuses on how to align the mission with the activities and yes, growing pains.

Part Three is strengthened by Sherwyn P. Morreale and James L. Applegate's sharing of experiences in using disciplinary societies to support, not just research, but engaged activity. Their six step approach ends with a positive note for the future, noting that we do risk creating some conflict when we reenter the realm of the public intellectual and stand toe-to-toe with community partners whom we sometimes learn from and sometimes critique.

Founder of Bentley College's Service-Learning Project, Edward Zlotkowski, and John Saltmarsh, Director of the New England Resource Center for Higher education at the University of Massachusetts - Boston conclude the edition as they discuss service learning within the context of academic change. They reinforce the need for leadership and collaboration while engaging in a curriculum for improved teaching, learning and scholarship. Along with that must come a supportive infrastructure which provides rewards for all involved.

Service learning programs are popular now; however, like every other area, some are better than others. Ones which are strong are those which have been led and developed by dedicated leaders who understood the issues discussed within this well written and edited book. Those who lack strong service programs or who are considering undertaking such an endeavor would do well to read this from cover to cover and encourage colleagues to read it prior to a planning session about their own programs. Not doing so could lead to needless errors, while learning from the experiences described in the book will move them closer to a successful program implementation for all involved.

Yes, long title; good read.