Chapter 6

Impacting and Influencing the System to Support Student Career Readiness, Voice, and Efficacy:
Development of an Experiential Service-Learning Course

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides context for the design of an experiential, service-learning-based capstone course that provides students with meaningful service-based learning experiences. Through experiential learning and publication opportunities, students develop transferable career development, communication, writing, and critical thinking skills. It is a related goal that students leave this course with improved self and collective efficacy and a fundamentally heightened awareness of their own potential to create positive change in their community.

INTRODUCTION

Whereas John Maxwell characterizes leadership as "influence, nothing more nothing less" (John Maxwell Leadership Podcast, 2019, para. 1), Condoleeza Rice describes power as "nothing" unless one "can turn it into influence" (O Magazine, 2002, p. 7). At the intersection of leadership, influence, and power, Maxine Waters has emphasized both perspective and possibility and speaks to the importance of creating environments in which individuals "think of themselves as people with influence and power" (Thomas, 2018, para. 26). It is critical that educational systems and courses be designed in ways that support students, and associated student identity, as change agents with the potential to influence their

lives and their communities. In particular, throughout all elements of their coursework, students should be encouraged, inspired, and empowered to reflect on their potential for change and impact and, in their role as agents of change (both presently and in the future), think confidently of themselves as capable of activating and leading social-justice related change in their own lives, contexts, and communities. Unfortunately, however, this does not always occur.

Research has consistently suggested, leadership, writing, and communication skills are lacking, to varying but noticeable degrees, in recent graduates and new hires. For example, oral and written communication skills, presentation skills, and other so-called soft skills are a critical component of workplace success (Rios et al., 2020; Sethi, 2016). Moreover, literature consistently emphasizes the importance of strong communication skills on success in business, legal, and other careers (Camacho, 2015; Clark & DeSanctis, 2013; Hampton, 2019; Vekaric & Jelic, 2013). However, despite the widely recognized and acknowledged importance of communication, written, and presentation skills, students often struggle in terms of mastery and transfer in this area. Nolop (2013), for example, describes a lack of strong writing skills as one of the most significant gaps in terms of workplace readiness. Relatedly, Leef (2015) writes of persistent and widespread awareness regarding challenges on the part of educational systems and programs to successfully ensure students acquire strong and transferable written communication skills. Additional emphasis on such skills and related opportunities for students to develop these skills and mindsets through their coursework remains both needed and critical.

This chapter explores a variety of reasons why it is important to both design courses in ways that support the development of these skills in students and also provide opportunities for students to apply and grow these skills in practice. The chapter offers an example in a paralegal studies service-based learning capstone course. Interactions amongst theory, practice, and policy in course design and curricular decisions are explored and evaluated as opportunities for positive change as well as deeper diversity content knowledge integration into related curriculum. The broader interactions between and amongst concepts such as positive psychology, self and collective efficacy, and equity and inclusion are also explored in addition to the possible design of related course work. The overall purpose of this chapter is to convey to the reader the many benefits of providing service-based learning experiences as a way of supporting student activism, voice, and impact as well as to provide an overview of how one might implement a service-based learning capstone course experience in higher education courses. While the illustrative capstone was designed for a paralegal studies program, the chapter emphasizes and also illustrates the value of incorporating service-based learning experiences in general education courses, as well.

THEORY, PRACTICE, AND POLICY MEET COURSE DESIGN AND CURRICULUM

Various aspects of theory, practice, and policy impact the level of diversity content knowledge integration into curriculum in interrelated and innumerable ways. These same aspects impact associated student self and collective-efficacy in equally interrelated and innumerable ways. This integration and the associated level of such integration are also dependent upon those same theories, practices, and policies. In this way, and as explored later in this chapter, the cyclical nature of theory, practice, and policy is demonstrated in the development, use, and codification of diversity and student self and collective efficacy in curriculum matters.

Platt (2002) writes of the persistent problems of separation, long beyond the act itself. By way of example, Platt points out that "[p]art of the reasons for the limitations of multiculturalism during the

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