

The Undergraduate Curriculum, Community and Citizenship

It is a great pleasure to be here and to have this opportunity to talk about what I believe is one of the critical issues confronting American higher education today--that is, educating our students to be competent, participatory democratic citizens in an increasingly complex, multicultural and truly international America. And it is, of course, also a great pleasure to tell you about the Rutgers Citizenship and Service Education (or CASE) program which I run and which, I at least believe, offers a possible model for how other colleges and universities can take up this challenge of citizenship education in a way that both complements and extends existing programs in all three traditional mission areas: research, teaching and service.

Let me start by offering you a quick overview of the CASE program's purpose, origins, growth, and future plans. Then, with that in hand, I want to devote most of my comments to how CASE--and citizenship and service-education programs in general--articulate with universities' research, teaching and service missions.

CASE Overview: Purpose, Origins, Growth, Current Program, and Future

The CASE program is, in effect, Rutgers response to two crises confronting Americans--and American educators--today.

- ◆ First, we are all increasingly concerned about the collapse of community in America and the related erosion of a sense of citizenship. We in higher education, and Americans across the country, decry young people's increasing alienation from politics and from their communities. Together we lament Americans' steady withdrawal from the public sphere, and growing preoccupation with purely private pursuits. And I think entirely appropriately, Americans across the country are now asking us in higher education just what we are doing to reverse these trends.
- ◆ Second, we are all increasingly concerned about the declining quality of education, at least defined in terms of our students' ability to do what they must be able to do to function effectively in our increasingly complex world. Here, of course, we confront the now familiar litany that Johnny can't write and Jane can't use a computer. But we are also in-

creasingly hearing complaints that Johnny and Jane lack the basic social skills necessary to work effectively with others. And, again, I think entirely appropriately, Americans across the country are now asking us in higher education just what we are doing to reverse these trends.

Now, of course, CASE hasn't magically fixed all this at Rutgers, and even I, tireless salesman of service-education that I am, can't promise that a similar program will magically fix it for you either--but I do want to suggest today that as such programs go, CASE has a lot to offer.

CASE got its start in 1988 when our then president, Edward Bloustein, observed that he feared that American higher education had lost its way and, specifically, that it had lost sight of its most important traditional purpose: to train young men and, later, young women to be good citizens possessing the skills their communities required. Indeed, the original Rutgers charter of 1766 (which is typical of such documents) declared the college's purpose to be to promote "learning for the benefit of the community." And so President Bloustein proposed that Rutgers "look at community service as a necessary component of the learning experiences which constitute a liberal education." A year later, an experimental version of CASE was up and running.

At the start, CASE was tiny, involving only a few courses and a few hundred students, but today it has grown into a large and thriving program.

- ◆ In 1993-94, CASE registered approximately 320 students in some 20 courses, most of them small, specialty seminars.
- ◆ In 1994-95, enrollments grew to 820 and CASE course offerings numbered 34.
- ◆ This year, total enrollments will reach nearly 2,500 in some 65 courses taught in fourteen different Faculty of Arts and Sciences departments from Comparative Literature to Sociology, and in eight professional schools from the School of Business to the School of Social Work.
- ◆ As for the future, CASE hopes to expand to enroll 5,000 students in 150 courses by the year 2000 such that by then one half of all graduating seniors to have taken at least one CASE course. CASE is planning to develop its own placement sites that will allow us to apply university resources directly to community-identified needs. And CASE has already begun providing assistance to universities in newly democratic countries

to help them to develop their own CASE programs. This month, for example, University of Natal in South Africa began teaching its first CASE courses, and beginning in spring 1997 we hope to be sending American students to take CASE courses at both University of Natal and University of Lublin in Poland.

- ◆ And, of course, with all this growth, CASE's community impact has grown as well. Each CASE student typically does 40 hours of community service, such that this year alone Rutgers CASE students will put 100,000 hours of service into New Jersey communities, while by the end of this year CASE students will have done a total more than 250,000 hours of community service as part of their college educations.

Here let me emphasize this last phrase "as part of their college educations," since the key thing about CASE is that it is a curricularly based service-learning program. That is, CASE combines a regular, three credit classroom course with a one credit community service placement directly relevant to the subject matter of the course. Actually, in practice each CASE course involves three integrated pieces:

- ◆ First, there's the classroom piece, which embraces all that would normally be taught, but adds material necessary for students to be able to use their service placements effectively to deepen and extend what they are learning in the classroom.
- ◆ Second, there's the service placement itself, which is chosen both to engage students in real, useful community service, and to force them to confront the complex, ambiguous human realities that lie behind the abstract materials they are studying in the classroom.
- ◆ Finally, there's the reintegration process, which the real key to the whole service-learning experience. Here students are asked both to reflect on community and citizenship and to process what they've seen and done at their service placement in terms relevant to the course. Here they are asked to forge a direct link between service and learning, to connect the classroom to the world beyond its walls, and to realize the real world relevance of their classroom learning.

This direct integration of service into the university curriculum is critical, and sets Rutgers CASE apart from many other college and university service programs, which locate service in student affairs or campus ministries. Such programs often provide real service to communities, and good

experience to students. But as co-curricular programs, they cannot address either of the crises I identified at the outset. Indeed, they may even make things worse in two ways.

- ◆ First, co-curricular programs send a very inappropriate message about citizenship and community. Like it or not, such programs are often built on the “charity model” of community service, a notion of community service as the doing of good works. But good citizenship and community service are not charity work you do when you have a free afternoon. Good citizenship and community service are not about “us” and “them.” Good citizenship defines you day in and day out, and community service is an expression of our citizenship, of your own, personal, intimate connection to your community.
- ◆ Second, co-curricular service-learning programs wrongly disconnect students’ service-learning experience from the bigger, broader learning experience of college as a whole. The message such programs send, unfortunately, is that there’s learning over here and service over there, when the real message we want to send is that everything you learn here applies out there, that what you are learning here are life skills.

So, again, I believe that service programs must be curricular. Our core business in higher education is the production and propagation of knowledge, and while we may do any number of other things, these are what we are really and truly about. Thus if citizenship education matters, our efforts in this area must be rooted in the curriculum, which is essential expression of what we do.

CASE and the University’s Traditional Missions: Research, Teaching and Service

Here, we can make an easy segue to talking about just how and how well citizenship and service education programs articulate with the “real business” of the university.

Of late in New Jersey and elsewhere around the country, public research universities have been taken to task for a supposed lack of attention to undergraduate education and service. Although personally I am inclined to view many such attacks as disingenuous or mininformed, I am happy to say that curricularly based citizenship and service-education programs comple-

ment, and in some instances extend, university efforts in the areas of both undergraduate education and service, and offer exciting research possibilities, too. I am also happy to say that Rutgers' generous funding of the CASE program reflects the central administration's clear understanding of these benefits.

Let me start with research, go on to service, and then concentrate on the educational benefits of service-learning programs.

Research: Two fruitful areas of research related to citizenship and service-education programs stand out. First, of course, such programs are themselves worthy subjects of study. CASE, therefore, has developed a variety of evaluation instruments to measure our impact on students' learning outcomes, sense of themselves as citizens, awareness of civil society, and sense of competence as young adults. Developing these instruments has provided a great research opportunity for students at the Graduate School of Education, and the instruments themselves are already being employed in research for at least one dissertation. Second, the subject of citizenship education programs--citizenship itself--is a complex, contested and continually changing concept, and has been the subject of wonderful research and reflection at least since Aristotle, Plato and Thucydides. CASE, therefore, collaborates with the Walt Whitman Center for the Culture and Politics of Democracy at Rutgers in a variety of research projects involving measuring citizenship, women as citizens, and so on. CASE is also seeking funding for a collaborative project with our partners in Poland and South Africa tentatively entitled "(Re)Inventing Democracy" that will compare and contrast the meaning of democratic citizenship in Poland, South Africa and the US.

Service: Service-learning programs can also contribute in three important ways to universities' ability to carry out their service mission. First, of course, programs such as CASE deliver, in effect, university resources to surrounding communities. In the most limited programs, this means simply delivering student volunteers, but can be much more. Rutgers CASE students, for example, have designed and installed a complete office information system at the New Brunswick Adult Learning Center--and donated the computers to run it on. Others have created a complete map and signage system for the Middlesex County Court House that is geared to the illiterate and non-English speaking. In still other cases, CASE courses have linked Rutgers faculty to community projects to create, for example, the Mason Gross

School for the Arts and Art Matters Too! elementary school dance program and the Cook College New Brunswick Urban Ecology Program's School Yard Ecology Project and New Brunswick Housing Authority-based Children's Garden and Environmental Education Program. Second, and often overlooked, programs such as CASE provide the community access to the university. With few exceptions, big universities are viewed with suspicion by the communities within which they are located, and even where such suspicion is not a problem, few community members anywhere know how to tap university resources to meet community needs. Constant, intimate contact between Community Partners and CASE, however, have helped alleviate the New Brunswick community's suspicion of Rutgers, and have given community members an ally within the university, as CASE has often been able to help identify possible Rutgers resources and other sources of assistance. Finally, ambitious service-learning program can serve as the basis for collaborative, mutually beneficial university-community projects. With the recent passage of Charter Schools legislation in New Jersey, for instance, CASE, a wide range of departmental and professional school representatives, and community leaders have begun discussion of the possibility of creating an alternative high school in New Brunswick that would offer high school students the benefits of Rutgers' resources, and offer Rutgers faculty and students the opportunity to practice what they preach.

Teaching: But, of course, whatever the research and service benefits service-learning programs offer, their most important benefits are surely to undergraduate education writ large. Indeed, the real beauty of service-learning is that it permits us to educate the whole student and, in the process, to help the student integrate academic learning, personal growth and the assumption of personal responsibility as a citizen in a concrete community.

Service-learning programs begin from the basic fact that motivates all activating learning programs: students who are forced to use what they are learning, learn it better and retain it longer. Service-learning programs go much further, however, and permit universities and faculty to achieve all of their major teaching aims efficiently and simultaneously. After all, in our courses we generally seek to achieve three, possibly four, things:

- First, we seek to teach something of the substance of our subject.
- Second, we seek to teach critical reading, thinking, writing, and speaking skills.

- Third, we seek to teach the self-confidence and basic social skills our students will need to survive on the job and in real life.
- And, fourth, at least some of us seek to teach the rudiments of what it means to be an active citizen and an engaged community member.

Unfortunately, however--and especially as declining teaching budgets have raised class sizes and pushed more and more classes to a lecture format--most of us can do only some of the first, a bit of the second and almost none of the third and fourth--although we would all admit that the first is the least important, the second is very important, and the third and fourth are the most important. In short, we have a serious mismatch between the pedagogy we use and our most important purposes.

This mismatch is easily corrected by taking a service-learning approach. After all,

- What better way to get students to engage the ideas we present than to put them in a situation where those ideas directly affect real human beings they care about?
- What better way to get students to master the substance of a course than to put them in a situation where that substance is essential to their ability to do their jobs?
- What better way to get students to understand the importance of an ability to read, think, speak and write critically than to put them in a situation where these skills determine their ability to get the job done?
- What better way to get students to learn the arts of association than to put them in a situation where their ability to be part of a team has an important impact on an agency's ability to render critically needed services to people in need?
- What better way to get students to think of themselves as citizens than to ask them to act as citizens and play a role in the life of their community?

Now this, of course, raises the obvious question many of you may have had from the start: just what, exactly, does a service-learning course intended to do all this actually look like. So let me conclude my presentation by quickly describing two CASE courses I particularly like--though I can assure you there are another 63 that are just as interesting!

Consider, for instance, Richard Garcia's "Modern Mythology" course in the Comparative Literature department. Richard doesn't think that the old Greeks and Romans have a monopoly on mythology, and doesn't think that myth-making died out 1500 years ago. For Richard, myths are all around us. They are the means by which we make sense of our surroundings, by which we define who we are and what makes us "us," by which we explain who has righteous power among us and why, by which we instruct our young, and by which we "map" our communities' boundaries and key features. And myth making, says Richard, is how we adjust to the rapid, sometimes catastrophic changes that shake our world.

But how to teach this to students as something other than the deadly dull texts of discourse analysis? And how to get students actually to write something better and more useful than warmed over, second-rate Foucauld?

Prof. Garcia's solution is to make his course into a service-learning course. To start, he trains his students in oral history techniques. Then, he works with local elementary schools, churches and senior citizens homes to put together teams of five students from his class, five elementary school kids and five senior citizens, all from the same ethnic community. (Here New Brunswick is great, because we have big Indian, Mexican, Taiwanese, Puerto Rican, Guatemalan, Vietnamese, Jamaican and other communities.) Together these "community teams" of fifteen work to create a "mythography" for their community. The Rutgers students have a protocol of myth types to look for and questions to ask, but the whole point of the exercise is to create something unique. So, for example, the kids are encouraged to draw illustrated maps of their communities that capture not cartographic reality but the kids' own sense of the known and the unknown. The seniors, too, are encouraged to draw illustrated maps--of their home villages, of their current community and of the relationship between the two.

When all is said and done, the maps, completed mythographies and individual stories are displayed in local churches, at the kids' schools, at the senior citizens homes and at Rutgers.

And what's all this produce? Well, for the Rutgers students, they've had the opportunity to take what they are learning in the classroom and become active players in the field. They've had the opportunity to meet and make friends with and come to understand people from a different culture--

that is also part of their own community. For the seniors, they've had the opportunity to share the fund of stories and knowledge they've acquired the hard way--and to pass it on to a new generation. For the elementary school kids, they've had the fun of working on a big project with adults--and probably without even realizing it, learned a lot as they had to write down and explain their own stories. No less important, at a very early age, they've had the seemingly distant, Anglo world of the university demystified, and gotten the not too subtle hint that someday they, too, ought to go to college.

Or consider "Nature of Politics," the entry course to Political Science. The course enrolls 250-300 freshmen and sophomores who attend two common lectures each week and are then divided into 9 smaller recitation sections for weekly discussions, three of which are designated as CASE sections. What do the kids in these sections do?

The Rutgers Office of Minority Recruitment runs a program called SURGE which identifies promising minority kids at the end of their eighth grade year. These kids and their parents sign a contract which says, in effect, that if the kid does X, Y and Z, and finishes high school with such and such a GPA and combined SATs of whatever, then he/she will be automatically admitted to Rutgers. Good deal, huh? The only problem is that Minority Recruitment has never had the tutors needed to support more than a handful of kids and the program has therefore been successful but tiny.

Well, no more, because beginning next year, every semester three sections of Nature of Politics--ninety kids worth--will provide one-on-one tutoring for the SURGE program, tripling the size of SURGE overnight.

Again, what we have here is a win-win situation. For the Rutgers students, what better way to render concrete the complex, abstract issues of political and democratic theory than this sort of personal encounter with the disadvantaged and discriminated against? For the SURGE kids, what better way to learn? And, more important, what a great way to bridge the seemingly unsurpassable gap between their lives and the distant university? And for Rutgers, what better way to engage the New Jersey community and to take on the challenge of minority recruitment?

So to conclude, I think it is fair to say that while no panacea, citizenship and service education programs such as Rutgers CASE offer real prom-

ise for universities struggling to meet public demands that we take up the challenge of educating the next generation of young Americans in the technical, social and citizenship skills they will need to survive and thrive in the 21st century. No less important, what recommends service-learning programs is that they are not--indeed, they cannot be--costly, peripheral add-ons to the “real work” of the university, but rather are integral to--and help to integrate--the three traditional missions of American universities, research, teaching and service, and do so with existing resources. Finally, and perhaps most important politically, at least for those of us who fear the wrath of disgruntled tax payers and state legislators, the potential of service-learning programs is proof positive that neither the notion of a “responsive research university” nor the notion of a public research university is necessarily oxymoronic. Or--to leave the ball in your court--if you fear that “responsive” doesn’t describe your institution, then service-learning might just be the thing for you!

Thank you.

D. Michael Shafer
Director, Rutgers CASE
Community Service House
Rutgers University
78 College Avenue
New Brunswick, NJ 08903