

## SERVICE-LEARNING AT BYU-IDAHO

*Douglas S. Ladle—Department of Religious Education*

As BYU-Idaho makes the transition into a four-year university and becomes an educational institution for the Millennium, will service-learning play an important role in its destiny? To answer this question, four dimensions should be considered: 1) What is service-learning? 2) The development of service-learning across the nation and at BYU-Idaho, 3) Its educational value as shown through research, and 4) Its potential at BYU-Idaho. This article will explore these four dimensions.

### WHAT IS SERVICE-LEARNING?

Service-learning at BYU-Idaho is a credit-bearing, educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets either community or campus needs. The students reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Service-Learning Committee Meeting Minutes, January 25, 2001).

Service at BYU-Idaho can be viewed as a continuum. On one end of this continuum are volunteerism and community service, as currently organized through the ASRC's Leadership and Service Institute and the campus wards and stakes. The service is performed by students but is not related to an academic course or a specific discipline.

**Service-learning  
begins in the  
classroom and then  
reaches out into  
the community.**

At the other end of the continuum are internships and practicums, which are offered in local or distant businesses and community agencies. In these experiences, a student receives credit and/or pay, and leaves the campus for an extended time to work on location.

In the middle of the continuum is service-learning. As explained above, this is a credit-bearing, educational experience which begins in the classroom and then reaches out into the community to engage the students in service that meets a community need. The service experience is part of the course as an optional component or as one of its requirements. Unlike an internship, the service-learning experience is measured in hours rather than days and weeks. As in all forms of experiential learning, the student learns by applying classroom knowledge in a hands-on, service-oriented experience.

### SERVICE-LEARNING ACROSS THE NATION AND AT RICKS COLLEGE

The term *service-learning* first emerged in the work of Sigmon and Ramsey at the Southern Regional Education Board in 1967. During

the early 1970's, the term became better known with the rise of campus-based service programs, but did not become nationally recognized until 1978, when the National Society of Internships and Experiential Education popularized the term. In the 1990's acceptance dramatically grew in academic circles with an increase of literature and research in publications and attention at national conferences. Momentum for the pedagogy has grown through the organization of Campus Compact (a national consortium of college presidents committed to promoting community service on college campuses—now numbering over 600 members). Campus Compact's most recent survey revealed a total of 11,800 service-learning courses taught at 575 member institutions.

In contrast to this national movement, the development of service-learning at Ricks College has been gradual and fairly recent. In the 1999-2000 academic year, a Service-Learning Committee was established. During that year, the committee surveyed campus departments to identify existing service-learning activities. From this survey, a wide variety of service-oriented activities were identified in courses across the campus; however, many of them did not meet the definition of true service-learning as stated above. Some of the successful service-learning experiences were being done in the Nursing, Accounting, Electrical Engineering, Elementary Education, and Sociology departments.

With the announcement that Ricks College would become a four-year university, the importance of service-learning increased. In the 2000-2001 school year, service-learning activities increased in the following ways:

- The Service-Learning Committee was expanded with the addition of five new members.
- The Leadership and Service Institute became a working partner with the Service-Learning Committee. Roles for the Committee and for the Institute were identified so that a policies and procedures handbook could be initiated.
- Presentations on service-learning were given at two Jacob Spori Teaching Summits, one in October, 2000, and again in January, 2001. There were also two faculty brown-bag presentations on service-learning given in February, 2001.
- Members of the committee attended two service-learning conferences. The first was the BYU Service-Learning Conference held in October, 2000. The other was the Serve-Idaho Conference in Nampa, Idaho, in March, 2001. Professional contacts were developed at these conferences, and Ricks College became a participant in the promotion of service-learning. A member of the committee participated in a

**The development of service-learning at Ricks College has been gradual.**

panel presentation at the Nampa conference on the topic: Practices in Service-Learning.

- Resources and procedures for funding service-learning activities were established through the joint efforts of the Institute, the Committee, and the Academics Office.
- Additional service-learning experiences were added to several campus courses.

#### THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF SERVICE-LEARNING

Two decades of research into the outcomes of service-learning on students has been accumulated. A summary of the research on service-learning from 1993 to 1999, compiled by Eyler, Giles, and Gray, showed that service-learning had positive effects in the following areas: 1) interpersonal development and the ability to work well with others, including enhanced leadership and communication skills, 2) sense of social responsibility and citizenship skills, 3) academic learning, 4) ability to apply what they have learned in the real world, 5) understanding, problem analysis, critical thinking, and cognitive development within their discipline, 6) an enhanced relationship with faculty who have a service-learning component, 7) and a greater degree of student satisfaction with college (Eyler, Giles, and Gray, 2000).

A longitudinal study involving 22,236 college students from 1994 to 1998 showed that service-learning had significant positive effects on eleven outcome measures. These measures included academic performance, social adjustment, leadership, self-efficacy, and career planning dimensions. These findings directly replicate a number of other recent studies using different samples and methodologies (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, and Yee, 2000).

**Service-learning is  
a valuable means  
in fulfilling all  
four of our mission-  
statements.**

When one considers the Mission Statement of BYU-Idaho, service-learning is a valuable means in fulfilling *all four* of our mission-statements. Acts of service help students build testimonies of Jesus Christ and encourage living its principles. The enhanced learning that comes from involvement in the community supplements their classroom education and improves the overall quality of education they receive at BYU-Idaho. By serving off-campus, students are prepared for further education and employment by receiving an exposure to the real-work experiences and environment of various careers. This experience also strengthens them for their future roles as citizens and parents. Finally, students involved in service-learning are more engaged in their education and more readily contribute to a wholesome academic, cultural, social and spiritual environment. Service-learning enhances the spiritual, intellectual, social, and cultural domains of the university experience.

## SERVICE-LEARNING'S POTENTIAL AT BYU-IDAHO

BYU-Idaho is now on the pathway toward four-year university status. Many universities have already made service-learning an important part of their educational experience. BYU-Provo has the Jacobsen Center For Service and Learning. The University of Utah has the Lowell Benion Community Service Center, respected for both its extracurricular service and its service-learning programs. Other nationally recognized service-learning programs exist at Colorado State University, the University of Michigan, and Stanford University.

When a service-learning program reaches full-bloom on a university campus, the following steps have been reached:

- Service-learning has become an essential educational experience which the university desires for many of its students. A large number of faculty include service-learning components in their curriculum, and service-learning courses are identified in the campus catalogue.
- A body of policies and procedures has become standardized to cover the concerns of faculty, students, and community agencies regarding liability, curriculum development, and the expectations of faculty, students, and the community agencies.
- Faculty who support service-learning experiences are encouraged and recognized as they qualify for academic rank. Since BYU-Idaho will not have academic rank, a teacher's quest for Continuing Faculty Status on the campus would be enhanced by implementing service-learning components in his or her courses.
- Funding for the faculty side of service-learning is supported by a budget of the Academics Office. Funding for the student side of service-learning is supplied through a substantial endowment from outside donors who value the outcomes of service-learning.
- A Service and Learning Center or organizational hub has been created to house service-learning materials, train the faculty, coordinate service activities within the community, review and evaluate service-learning activities on the campus, and promote additional on-and off-campus service-learning experiences in higher education.

As service-learning develops at BYU-Idaho, the Service-Learning Committee has proposed an energetic agenda for the near future. Their goals include:

- Each semester, ten additional faculty members will add service-learning components to their curriculum offerings.

- A resource and training program will be established through which faculty can receive help in establishing service-learning experiences in their curriculum.
- A BYU-Idaho Service-Learning Conference will be held annually as a resource for campus faculty to learn about service-learning and exchange ideas for implementation of service-learning in their courses.
- Service-learning awards will be offered each Spring at the Faculty Association Banquet to professors who adopt creative and meaningful service-learning experiences in their curriculum.
- When service-learning has become established at BYU-Idaho, many service-learning courses will be offered across the campus. This growth will require more coordination and promotion than a committee can provide. At that time, a Service and Learning Center will be established through the assistance of donations from contributors. This center will be a joint enterprise between Academics and the Leadership and Service Institute.

**There will be a search for balance between Service and Learning.**

BYU-Idaho and service-learning will definitely grow together as an important dimension of Zion. Growing pains will continue for a time. There will be a search for balance between Service and Learning. Sometimes it will be SERVICE-learning; other times it will be service-LEARNING, but eventually the right mix of SERVICE-LEARNING will be achieved. Service-learning is a successful way for BYU-Idaho to fulfill its four-fold Mission Statement. In its most pure and refined application, service-learning may be the millennial-era practice which will eventually bring forth the most educational success in Zion. ∞

#### WORKS CITED

- Astin, Alexander W., Vogelgesang, Lori W., Ikeda, Elaine, K., and Yee, Jennifer A., *Executive Summary: How Service Learning Affects Students*. Higher Education Research Institute, University of California, Los Angeles, January, 2000.
- Eyler, Janel, Giles, Dwight E., Jr, and Gray, Charlene J., "Research at a Glance: What We Know about The effects of Service-Learning on Students, Faculty, Institutions, and Communities, 1993-1999." Included in *Introduction to Service-Learning*, Campus Compact, Brown University, 2000.