APUAF – February 4, 2011 Workshop on Service Learning Opportunities

Summary of highlights

The first half-day workshop sponsored by APUAF and focusing on a single theme was devoted to service learning (or community service) and hosted by the ACCENT-Paris Center. It was attended by 15 on-site directors and/or staff. The four presentations, in English and French, were followed by a lively discussion on the benefits and challenges of integrating service learning into study programs in France as well as practical issues. Presenters included:

- Shelley Cavaness, Central College of Iowa -Paris: Definitions of Service Learning (SL)
- Lilli Engle, AUCP in Aix-en-Provence: Curricular Design & SL: the AUCP Model
- Elisabeth Pascaud President of the Paris chapter of France Bénévolat: Types of SL in Paris
- Sylvie Rockmore, IAU-Avignon: Voluntary Service Learning & the Avignon Experience

I.   Shelley Cavaness - What is Service-Learning? Service versus Learning

Overview of definitions of SL from: National Society of Experiential Education, Campus Compact, American Association for Higher Education's SL Project, Forum on Education Abroad Glossary. (Handout available on request: **cavaness@central-paris.fr**).

Key components of Service-Learning focused on <u>learning</u> goals (per Forum definition):

1) Academic rigor > academic framework + clear link to course concepts + faculty involvement/supervision.
2) Reflection > not limited to personal journals and subjective experiences but includes observing, writing, analyzing, synthesizing information.
3) Reciprocal Partnership > a joint venture and two-way process, not driven only by student goals.

II.   Lilli Engle - AUCP's Model & Experience since 1995

Key statistic: 88% of today's college & university professors believe colleges should encourage community service (increase of 19% in 3 years) - March 2009 study, UCLA Higher Education Research Institute.

In AUCP's model, community service (CS) has been an integral aspect of the curriculum since 1995. It is compulsory for all students enrolled in a course that includes SL as one of its five components. Over 1,100 students have done CS since 1995. Unlike an internship, CS is not designed to be a résumé-enhancing experience but to foster active engagement, meet community needs and serve an educational purpose that includes students' intercultural development.

Based on theory of experiential learning & Kolb's Adult Learning Stages.
5 stages: Doing – Sharing reactions & observations – Processing (patterns) – Generalizing (inferring principles) – Applying (planning more effective behavior)

<u>Rewards of CS: Doing Good</u>

For the community	>	Idea of interconnected world & "maillon d'amour"
	➢	Giving back to community & touching others with friendship & caring
	➢	Students as ambassadors of U.S. & image of U.S. abroad

For the student	>	Sense of purpose & belonging.
	➢	Security in doing.
	➢	Desire to be liked – affective component.

<u>Pitfalls of CS: Doing Harm</u>

To the Community	>	Depletion of local human resources. (Taking away from someone else in community.)
	➢	Discouragement due to inefficient, irregular assistance. (Lack of commitment.)
	➢	Breaking hearts. (e.g., French elderly people become attached to students who disappear" and may never be heard from again.)

To the Student	> Possible loss of self-esteem – experience may not live up to expectations.
	➢ Students may end up feeling unappreciated, useless, ineffectual.

See NAFSA 2007: *Who Is Serving Whom? Ethical Dilemmas in Service Learning*   www.softconference.com/270527

II. Management Issues

> All students interviewed at the outset – staff person helps students choose among available opportunities.
> Formal agreement or *convention* (9 articles) signed by all makes the arrangement official.
> Students must commit to 2 hours per week.

Examples of placements in Aix : Croix-Rouge, Secours Catholique, English tutoring in private schools, distributing meals to homeless, retirement homes, Amnesty International.

In class, students write weekly assignment based on their CS and discuss their observations with the instructor who helps them contextualize and analyze their experience within a French cultural framework.

Key question: Is community service viewed as a *product* or a *relationship* (with local community)?

III. Issues to consider & constraints:

➢ Sustainability (Will the relationship be long-lasting? Does it meet a real need?)
➢ Finding good partners – and keeping them.
➢ Health considerations & paperwork.
➢ Staffing - Who will oversee placements & ensure necessary follow-up?
➢ Contractual agreement and insurance issues.

III.	Elisabeth Pascaud – France Bénévolat (FB)		www.francebenevolat.org

France Bénévolat is a national network composed of 85 local chapters whose aim is to assist local groups and associations in creating volunteer opportunities, motivating & training *bénévoles* (volunteers).

Differents forms of *bénévolat* or service opportunities with different aims.
Occasional (one-time events) versus Regular (ongoing, weekly)

One-time events
> way of sensitizing people to helping others & what CS is about, no curricular or educational goal
> often appeals to young people because a group event, social or festive atmosphere & less commitment

Ex : Food bank collection in supermarket; wrapping holiday gifts in a mall; sorting donated clothing; neighborhood festival or event like World Cup for Homeless (10 days in August 2011), Access for the Disabled Day, Race against Hunger (sponsored by French NGO *Action contre la faim*)

Regular CS – more challenging
Often involves working with population in distress (unemployed, disabled, chronically ill, at-risk students)
Regular commitment in 2 respect : weekly + long term (i.e., minimal requirement of 1 or 2 years)
May involve mandatory training, especially with at-risk populations.
New generation of « nouveaux bénévoles » hesitant to make a long-term commitment.
Some associations are beginning to understand this new profile but many are slow to adapt expectations.

Possible middle ground or third solution
Idea of creating and offering basic, practical workshops, e.g., how to use a computer (e-mail, Internet)
Workshops over several months aimed at disenfranchised groups require flexibility and ability to be sensitive and adapt to needs of people in difficult circumstances who may not attend regularly.
Skill-based community service: creating a home page, web site or data base.

Another possibility : cultural workshop, e.g., ethnic cooking class, sewing, dance
Centres d'animation – possible workshops on U.S. culture for young people in neighborhood centers.
France Bénévolat is trying to encourage associations to consider short-term projects.

Linguistic constraint :
At-risk groups or people in difficult circumstances may have trouble understanding non-native speakers or students.
Selon Mme Pascaud, « S'ils ne sont pas bien compris, ils ne peuvent pas aider. »

Ways in which programs & schools interested in CS might proceed (in collaboration with FB) :
- ➢ Creating partnerships (groups of students working on specific projects).
- ➢ Contacting large associations like Secours Catholique – often requires advance planning.
- ➢ Contacting local *centres sociaux & centres d'animation* which often attract multicultural populations.

IV.   Sylvie Rockmore – The Avignon Experience

Philosophy: Why integrate or offer community service?

- ➢ moral reasons > as a way for students to give back and not be mere tourists or leeches.
- ➢ human reasons > as a way of meeting and working with others for a common purpose, fostering respect for others, genuine exchange and mutual learning.
- ➢ cultural reasons > a form of integration & direct engagement with French culture, experiencing cultural differences firsthand & getting an "insider's view" (e.g., on French versus U.S. hospital or retirement home)
- ➢ linguistic reasons > communicating in French in a non-academic context & using different language register

Not necessarily or primarily an educational or curricular goal (versus an internship where student gains something).
CS not required but strongly encouraged and many opportunities offered.
Staff also engaged in CS.
Initial interview with program director.

Occasional service or one-time event (with participation of program staff)
- • Food bank – just after Thanksgiving & in keeping with notion of harvest & spirit of sharing.
- • Festival de Villeneuve-les-Avignon – acting as guide for festival events.

Regular opportunities (at least once/week)
Examples : working with a traditional baker (artisan boulanger) or pastry-maker; computer workshop for disabled; organizing activities in a retirement home (Powerpoint virtual tour of US); English conversation classes or tutoring in vocational secondary schools (LEP) that may not have English assistants; museum workshops; working in local library; Secours Populaire; Secours Catholique

In IAU's experience:
- ▪ Associations are pleased because they are also committed to making it work from outset.
- ▪ Same rules & process as for internships : letter, interview, signed contract for insurance purposes.
- ▪ Follow-up done by program director (anywhere from 1/3 to half of students participated)
- ▪ Civic involvement or engagement is familiar to many U.S. students – a motivating factor for many.
- ▪ Setting up CS opportunities entails creating a strong network > a lot of work !

Tentative conclusions & Good practices

Whether CS is optional or an integral part of the program, all panelists emphasized the following:

- ✓ Students involved in service learning generally gained a great deal from the experience while "giving back".
- ✓ Community service differs from an internship which focuses more on what students "get".
- ✓ Finding opportunities, creating and sustaining partnerships requires time and effort on the part of program staff; human resource needs must be adequate.
- ✓ Students should be carefully guided in the process, preferably by program staff.
- ✓ Commitment by all parties is critical, and a written contract is advisable (for insurance purposes).
- ✓ Follow-up by program staff and opportunities for debriefing and/or sharing experiences are important.
- ✓ A certain level of French proficiency is desirable, if not required, for some types of placements..

In the discussion that followed, the following points were raised by attendees:

- The distinction between a for-credit internship and community or service learning is not always so clearcut, especially in Paris. Certain programs that work with internship organizations, for example, have had students placed in NGOs or community centers that are more akin to "community service" but for which they receive internship credit..

- Some participants expressed reservations about requiring community service which somewhat contradicts the French notion of *bénévolat* as a voluntary activity. At the same time, students who select a program that requires community service understand that they are making a commitment, and this may be a strong marketing point.

- Students are increasingly interested in experiential opportunities, and the demand seems likely to grow.

- Careful thought needs to be given to the goals of community service and how it is presented in the program description and materials, i.e., as a product or a relationship.

Handouts distributed at the workshop are available upon request.

A.P.U.A.F. thanks all of the presenters and Melissa Smith-Simonet of ACCENT for their contributions to this event.

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