UGA 2016 Academic Affairs Faculty Symposium

Integrative Teaching and Learning: Within and Beyond the Classroom

Report and Recommendations of the Service Learning Group

"Developing a culture of service-learning at UGA"

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The goal of integrative teaching and learning is that students integrate what they learn across courses, over time, and inside and outside the classroom. Service-learning, which takes students into the "real world" beyond the classroom through student engagement to meet a community-based need, is one of the cornerstones of integrative learning and is also one of the central components of experiential learning; all UGA students, beginning in fall 2016, will be required to take at least one experiential learning course.

Service-learning is a three-legged stool, consisting of faculty and staff, students, and the community in which students are placed. A successful service-learning program, i.e., one that is integrative rather than simply an educational "add-on," will require the cooperation of all three parties and the development of a culture of service-learning on campus. It will require UGA to be bold and innovative.

The Service-Learning Group (SLG) identified the following challenges to integrative service-learning:

1. There is likely to be an enormous increase in demand for experiential learning credits in three to four years, when the fall 2016 entering cohort approaches graduation and many students will probably still need to satisfy the experiential learning requirement. We anticipate that this demand will fall most heavily on service-learning because this seems to be the most accessible (non-competitive, no additional financial burden, does not compete with working student's schedules) experiential option that will be able to meet the need of thousands of students in a short period of time.

2. Faculty will be called upon to teach service-learning (SL) classes to meet these needs, and we see little evidence that they are sufficiently prepared to

do so. We are concerned that the supply for SL classes will not meet the demand, particularly if faculty members have little incentive to create or teach SL classes.

3. A large-scale SL program might well mean that hundreds of students will be going into the local community at the same time, at limited and disjointed semester-based intervals, which could saturate and frustrate the schools and other community organizations/agencies in which students are most likely to be placed.

4. An additional factor to consider is that UGA students, who largely come from privileged backgrounds, will be entering facilities and communities where they most likely be working with those who are disadvantaged. UGA's own racially charged history and past associations make it important that the institution tread carefully and sensitively when working with the local community. Students themselves may well be unprepared for the challenges and discomforts that they are likely to encounter in doing service-learning, particularly when going into disadvantaged communities.

5. All of the above factors highlight the need to develop good SL practices as well a culture of service-learning on campus. The Office of Service Learning, which has done an excellent job of encouraging, initiating, and supporting service-learning courses, cannot be expected to carry single-handedly the burden of implementing the kind of mass SL roll-out that will have to take place over the next two years.

The group made the following recommendations:

1. Create blended online SL courses at the 1000- or 2000-level that would be taught every semester, including summer, to accommodate the demand for service learning; the Office of Online Learning and the Office of Service-Learning would be important resources to draw upon for this initiative. An additional benefit to summer classes is that students could do their service-learning in their home communities throughout Georgia, thus reducing the need to place such a large number of students in the Athens area.

2. Expand support for the Office of Service Learning. We anticipate that the expansion of service-learning will lead OSL to assume a role similar to that performed by the Office of International Education—OSL will have oversight of the many different SL classes just as OIE does for study-abroad classes. OSL will be responsible for working with faculty, advisors, departments and colleges as well as other units and personnel who are engaged in community-based initiatives such as the Fanning Institute, Public Service and Outreach, the Carl Vinson Institute, the Archway Partnership, and county extension agents.

3. Students need to be prepared to engage in service-learning and trained in collaboration skills and cultural competence. We propose that UGA establish a foundational prerequisite before a student can engage in service-learning; this prerequisite could be an on-line course or module that is connected with the experiential transcript (much like the IRB online format for faculty). The online module would include testimonials from students about the obstacles, opportunities, challenges and benefits of service learning. Outside speakers, and resources from the Office of Institutional Diversity, could be also be included to augment these points and to address the multicultural challenges of service learning.

4. UGA should use its well-educated staff of advisors to manage student SL placements and to supervise this foundational prerequisite. We believe that advisors should be an important component of the integrative learning process.

5. Faculty need to be supported and rewarded for developing well designed integrative learning courses, including SL. One option would be to create a certificate program through the Office of Training and Development; faculty who complete it would receive an Integrative Teaching and Learning Certificate. Another option would be to provide funds for research and travel for faculty who create SL classes. UGA should expand the Service-Learning Fellows program to give more faculty the opportunity to develop their expertise in this area.

6. Although this is not an issue confined to service-learning, the faculty evaluation and reward system (FTE assignment, annual review, tenure and post-tenure review) needs to be adjusted to acknowledge and reward faculty involvement in integrative teaching methodologies.