

THE ROLE OF THE LIBRARY IN ACHIEVING CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

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Recent trends in higher education highlight the value of intentionality in pedagogical approaches to civic learning. Student success and retention in the first year of college is particularly important in setting the foundation for the rest of the college experience, and evidence is mounting that First Year Learning Communities that are involved in civic and service learning projects tend to produce higher rates of retention and graduation. Academic libraries can play a vital role in achieving co-curricular activities.

This role may include creating, sponsoring and promoting intellectual, cultural, and social activities that emphasize library, classroom, campus, community, and civic connectivity, as well as developing, implementing, and channeling technologies that can showcase relevant resources and innovations. This requires, however, that librarians establish collaborations with key groups and actors involved in civic learning, and that libraries be willing to experiment with new ideas and technologies.

This presentation explored potential barriers and bridges in developing co-curriculum activities and civic engagement projects. Examples of bridges included strategies for working with Learning Community faculty and with Residential Life to reach students where they live. Residential life programs may be involved in providing housing for Freshman Interest Groups by floor, for instance and libraries may be involved in grant-related activities such as NEA's Big Read initiative to promote campus reading celebrations among student groups.

Other ideas involved sponsoring common intellectual experiences that connect students and colleagues; attending an ALA Moderator Training workshop; involving the library in

deliberative forums; spreading the word through blogs and RSS feeds; and supplementing faculty and service learning efforts with guest speakers, panels, websites, bibliographies and online discussions. Discussion also centered on the role of collaborative learning through the use of collaborative technologies such as webcasting, podcasting, wikis, and other Web 2.0 interactive tools.

Some of the challenges to the promotion of civic engagement were identified as engrained traditional approaches to higher education; lack of incentives to form learning communities; underinvestment in the concept by higher education institutions; difficulties involved with the quantification of effectiveness; faculty disengagement with public life; classism, racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism; and numbness to the suffering of others.

According to Thomas Ehrlich, "civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference." Academic libraries and librarians can serve as an organizing focal point for faculty development, student services, campus administrators, community engagement/service learning centers, and the academic curriculum. By creating and promoting co-curricular activities in civic engagement on college campuses, academic libraries can make a difference in the civic life of our communities.

SUGGESTED READING

<http://www.usi.edu/library/Documents/Learning%20Communities%20Resources%20Selected%20Resources.pdf>

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