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The College Park Scholars Program at the University of Maryland is a learning community created on the model of a residential college, designed to attract and retain academically talented undergraduates. Faculty agreed to require an experiential learning component as part of a coherent curriculum that builds toward an academic citation over two years. Three experiential learning components they designed for students enrolled in the program were colloquia, service learning units, and Discovery Projects, all of which draw widely from the Metropolitan Baltimore-Washington community.

Learning Communities: Moving beyond Classroom Walls

The quality of undergraduate education at large research universities in urban and metropolitan areas has come under considerable scrutiny and subsequent criticism over the past several years. Evidence from a variety of higher education assessment studies clearly shows what many in higher education suspected: that undergraduates, far from benefiting from the rich resources of research-dominated institutions, are in many cases being shortchanged.

Many universities have responded to these critiques by focusing on transforming the first-year experience—creating learning communities, introducing interactive and experiential learning opportunities to students in large classes, and creating active learning opportunities that take students beyond the classroom to create a broader venue for teaching and learning.

When the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP), inaugurated its first learning community in 1994, little thought was given to creating connections between city and classroom. Those of us charged with building what we named the College Park Scholars program were much more concerned with creating cross-disciplinary connections on campus—and negotiating the cross-campus alliances necessary for the survival of the program—than with linking our learning communities to the Washington-Baltimore metropolitan area. Yet, within the first semester of our experiment with learning communities, it became clear that some of the most creative worthwhile curricular innovations would come as a result of connecting our thematic programs to the resources of our metropolitan area.

Situated within 30 miles of metropolitan Washington and Baltimore, the University of Maryland is not a typical urban campus. Rather, our public research university is located in a suburban environment, connected to the two major cities by a commuter rail line, a metropolitan transit system (metro), and interstate highways. The arrival of the metro system in 1993 enhanced opportunities for both faculty and students to engage in off-campus learning activities. In fact, this year the university's primary marketing publication, the admissions "Viewbook," chose as its theme, "Right here, Right now," with a two-page aerial shot of the campus that includes markers for the Washington Monument and the U.S. Capitol. The campus is finally in a position to take advantage of its prime location on the East coast as the largest research university in the area, and the emergence of learning committees for undergraduates provides faculty with an innovative vehicle for curriculum transformation.

College Park Scholars

By way of background, the learning community model adopted by the University of Maryland College Park Scholars is a residentially-based, academic program that stops short of becoming a self-contained residential college. Students take a constellation of general education courses that they choose from a focused list of electives created by the faculty director responsible for a particular theme. Currently, there are ten thematic tracks, or "CPS Programs": Advocates for Children, American Cultures, Arts, Business Society and the Economy, Environmental Studies, Life Sciences, International Studies, Public Leadership, Science, Technology, and Society, and Science Discovery and the Universe. Each program track is directed by a professor from a related field (e.g., human development, American studies, music, geology, entomology, government and politics, electrical engineering, astronomy), who is supported for one month in the summer and released half-time from departmental responsibilities to design the two-year curriculum, lead the weekly colloquia course, direct the experiential learning activities, and mentor undergraduate students in the program. Each program has approximately 70-90 students per class cohort, for a total of 140-180 freshmen and sophomore students a year.

The College Park Scholars program was created with three strategic goals in mind: to enhance undergraduate education, to attract higher quality applicants to the university, and to increase retention and persistence of first-year students. To achieve these goals, the campus supported the development of faculty-led learning communities, designed to "make the big store small," and encouraged faculty to design interdisciplinary curricula that could take advantage of the unique Baltimore-Washington metropolitan resources.

The two-year curriculum provides continuity for students and allows faculty the luxury of time to develop their themes over four semesters, while progressively building more cognitively complex activities into the program.

The Learning Community as a Site for Faculty Development

One of the discoveries we made when we set out to create functioning learning communities on our campus was that before the campus could come close to creating meaningful communities for students, we needed to create a climate and a venue in which faculty could learn from each other. In bringing faculty together to discuss and brainstorm the common elements of the CPS program, we found that we had created a stimulating faculty development opportunity that generated broader discussions around syllabus design, program goals, and pedagogy. The faculty were unified in their commitment to high academic standards, cross-disciplinary study, and civic education and involvement.

In their first quasi-desperate attempts to respond to the challenge of creating new programs, the faculty agreed that they would reach out to their colleagues from different departments across campus, inviting faculty speakers from many different colleges and departments to address themes in their colloquia. It was in these early colloquia that an electrical engineering professor invited an architecture professor to speak with his Science, Technology, and Society students and discuss architectural engineering challenges, and the entomology professor invited a professor from philosophy to speak to his Life Sciences students about bioethics.

The early success of these collaborative efforts generated a level of engagement and excitement that spread rapidly among the faculty involved, and by the second semester, it was a short jump from these creative uses of on-campus resources to an interesting and extensive use of off-campus resources to enhance the learning experience of the students.

Experiential Learning: Putting the Theory into Practice

One of the unique requirements of the College Park Scholars curriculum is the experiential learning component. We know from current literature in learning theory that educators in all disciplines enthusiastically endorse the concept of hands-on learning. However, most of the traditional hands-on learning takes place in the last two years of a student's college career in the form of an internship or capstone experience. The faculty in the College Park Scholars program accepted the challenge of thinking creatively about providing experiential learning within the first two years of college. Part of the great advantage of a coherently designed two-year program is that both students and faculty have more flexibility to plan in two-year segments, beginning planning for a learning experience at the end of one semester in preparation for the next.

The faculty directors agreed that some form of internship or concentrated experience would be a required part of the citation requirement for College Park Scholars. They also acknowledged that traditional internships were not appropriate for freshmen and sophomore students. Each CPS student must earn an experiential learning credit in the pursuit of the academic CPS Citation. The citation is recorded on the student's transcript at the end of the two-year program, much like a traditional

honors citation. Students must complete all of the program requirements to be awarded the citation: a 3.0 grade point average in the 3-5 thematically focused general education courses and an experiential learning credit. The citation is awarded in a ceremony in the early fall of the student's junior year, usually scheduled to coincide with Family Weekend activities.

Three special curricular programs emerged as templates for that experiential requirement. The first of these, the *College Park scholars colloquia* serves as the linking course that ties the program requirements together. *Service learning*, the second program component, addresses the broad goal of civic education and builds on existing campus-community networks. The third, *discovery projects*, takes the most traditional of university activities—research and discovery of knowledge—and creates a special opportunity for undergraduates. All three of these experiential learning components have expanded and multiplied the direct connections between the campus and the cities of Baltimore and Washington.

Colloquia: Bringing the City into the Classroom/Bringing the Classroom into the City

The CPS colloquia provide the glue that ties the elective courses together, and create a continuing relationship among the students in the program and between the students and their faculty director. From its inception, the faculty embraced the colloquia as their opportunity to be experimental and innovative with the idea of their cross-disciplinary themes, as described above. It is here, in the colloquia, that faculty first began to explore ways to expand the definition of the classroom. The faculty directors lead weekly colloquia that relate the courses and the co-curricular experiences to the themes, and these colloquia can be scheduled in a way that provides faculty the flexibility needed to design on and off-campus learning experiences. Through the cooperation of the provost's and the registrar's offices, faculty were able to cut through some of the bureaucratic red tape that typically surrounds new courses and new programs. Linking classes in the schedule and advertising the clusters in a special part of the class schedule constitute one example. Scheduling colloquia late in the afternoon so that guest speakers can be invited to stay for dinner in the dining halls with the students is another. Scheduling the colloquia as a lab, and holding a block of time once a week, allows some faculty to take their students to sites in Washington or Baltimore. We found that when faculty took the time during the first semester to lead an excursion on the metro from the campus to a site in downtown Washington, they could realistically expect students to complete an off-campus assignment on their own by the second or third semester.

American Cultures director Jo Paoletti introduced her students to the definition of American culture by escorting them to a street fair in Tacoma Park, where they sampled ethnic foods, listened to multilingual street talk, and enjoyed "dancing in the streets." Arts director Ed Walters took his students to the National Gallery and the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, where they were able to talk to the

actors in rehearsal, after first reading the play *Les Miserables* and listening to the music. Professor Albert Gardner of Advocates for Children took his students to the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, to focus attention on the collective responsibility we have for the child victims of historic cataclysms. These trips and the follow-up colloquia discussions created an important shared context for the program themes. As one student's journal put it,

In my opinion, the most striking display was the one that told how to recognize non-Aryans: the display had hair color samples, eye color samples, photographs and calipers [sic] to measure the size of a person's head and nose. It amazes me that thousands of people were fooled into believing that they were superior to someone else just because their heads and noses were smaller, or their hair blonder. In high school my history teacher told us of one historian's thesis that the Holocaust took place only because people let it—all over Germany and even internationally, people knew Jews were dying just because they were Jews—yet no one did anything to help the millions that died. Why? Because they were afraid? Because they were indifferent? Because they didn't want to get involved? All I know is that innocent children died. The truth is, it would be a lot easier to ignore the tragedy of the Holocaust. But if we forget or ignore it...those millions of people will have died in vain, and we will have learned nothing.

The critical component of all of these colloquia activities is that they are tied closely to the syllabus of the particular course. By locating the experiential learning activities in the colloquium, the program takes advantage of a nontraditional course model that may not exist in departmental courses. The faculty directors have the option of meeting for one hour every week or offering students a chance to take a "mini-colloquium" that might meet twice a week for an hour and a half, but for 4 weeks instead of 13. The colloquium is also the site for faculty to assign credit for service learning and independent research, which will be discussed below.

Because the learning community faculty directors have a continuous relationship with their students over two years, they can take the long-term perspective, fostering a kind of independence that does not have to be rushed, building on first semester activities and spiraling back to them for fourth semester capstone objectives.

Service Learning: Constructing a Civic Curriculum

In January, 1998, UCLA published its annual analysis of college freshmen, suggesting that the current generation of students is more apathetic and less politically involved than any prior generation. The faculty of College Park Scholars have made a commitment to civic education. Since CPS itself creates a civic culture of community and mutual responsibility, the program extends that commitment to the broader metropolitan community through its academic programming.

On their first full day on campus after arrival in the fall, CPS students are sent into the community on a massive community service project—the annual CPS Service Day. On August 28, 1997, we sent 600 new freshmen into the College Park

and Baltimore/ Washington metropolitan community to engage in one-day service projects at 30 different sites. Each faculty director, as well as many volunteer faculty and staff from all across the campus, joined students in weeding bike trails, painting playgrounds, and doing odd jobs for senior citizens.

Managing a project of this size is no small task, but the payoff for the students, the university, and the community is tremendous. We have found Service Day to be one of the strongest community building experiences in the CPS program, and it directly ties to our curricular service learning component within the academic program. The one-day service project jump-starts a discussion of the relationship between the campus and the community, and immediately grounds students in some of the civic and city-wide projects that they can choose to continue throughout their two-year experience.

Typically, we send students to approximately two dozen different sites for a variety of projects. Sites for Service Day are selected in partnership with the university president's office, the College Park City Council, and neighborhood organizations. This year the city of College Park gave any city employees who so chose permission to join the teams of volunteers for the day. Teams of 15-18 students cleared nature trails at Paint Branch Elementary school, renovated a house for a low-income family at Marshal Heights Community Development Organization, and planted flowers and pruned trees at James Addams Park. Students worked with the City's Public Works Department, the Committee for a Better Environment, and the Anacostia Watershed.

It was an exceptionally valuable community-building experience not just for the college students, but for the city as well. These moments do not happen by accident. They are intentional outcomes of careful planning and considerable risk-taking. Through faculty development workshops, we guided faculty to understand more fully the possibilities of this kind of learning experience. We also constructed a protocol for credit-bearing projects that include increasingly sophisticated reflection activities.

One requirement common to all service learning projects is journal writing, introduced as a way to get students to think in more principled ways about their experiences and to connect those experiences to the concepts in their thematic scholars program. Faculty hold high expectations for these reflective journals, and they are frequently incorporated as an early assignment (or even a pretest writing sample) into the first-year required composition class that is linked to the CPS program.

Students who find Service Day to be particularly meaningful are encouraged to explore a more extensive commitment to service-learning as a way of fulfilling their experiential learning requirement for the program. As one student wrote,

I'm from New Jersey, and today really made me feel like I wanted to switch my voter registration to Maryland. I met the mayor of College Park, and I want to be able to vote for him because now I know him and I feel like this is going to be my community. After all, this is going to be my home for the next four years!

Discovery Projects: Situated Research Projects

Community service is voluntary in the program, but experiential learning is not. CPS has a strict citation requirement that students engage in an experiential learning project in order to earn the transcript citation. As positive, reinforcing, and rewarding as service learning is, it is not for everyone, nor is it embraced equally by every faculty director. For students whose preferred learning style and mode of inquiry are more traditionally research oriented, we developed a unique research opportunity. With support through a grant from the U. S. Department of Education Funds for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education (FIPSE), we developed a sophomore-level “capstone” research experience called “Discovery Projects.”

Discovery Projects began as an experimental assignment in the Science, Technology, and Society Program. History professor Robert Friedel assigned his students to choose an invention, and then to research the patent and the inventor by using the voluminous resources at the Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention at the Smithsonian Institution Museum of American History. Working closely with the museum Lemelson Center archivist, Friedel helped students find primary sources, including inventors’ notes and sketches, early prototypes, and even personal journals. Students picked a invention they were curious about—the curling iron, the snow board, Tupperware—and were let loose in the archives. Their products at the end of the semester were not traditional research papers. Rather, the goal was to assemble an “invention discovery kit” that had copies of original documents, carefully classified and labeled. The kits become an artifact archive for later papers or can even be offered to local public school libraries.

This is another example of how the faculty function as a creative learning community themselves. Friedel shared his project with the other faculty directors at a faculty retreat, and they caught a measure of his excitement. Collectively they brainstormed ways of generating similar “discovery projects” in their fields, and stimulated each other to design unique undergraduate research assignments for their students. Thus we had students in International Studies linked with professional archivists in the National Archives, where they pored through boxes of old letters and photos, recently declassified memoranda, and CIA reports, audiotapes, and old news-reel footage. One student learned of bungled plots to assassinate Castro in the 1960s and listened to tapes of CIA debriefings that had been only recently declassified. Another student discovered boxes of letters from African Americans to the Secretary of State in the 1930s requesting permission to fight in the Ethiopian Italian War.

The Discovery Projects are designed by the faculty directors to tie to the theme of the program, and give students the widest possible latitude in topic choice. The faculty establish the sites for research and conduct program-wide workshops for students on different research methodologies. Students practice the skills of searching, recording, classifying, analyzing, and assessing information—stopping just short of writing a paper. These projects are targeted to sophomore students, with the goal of creating a sense of excitement around “discovery.” Faculty were at first

skeptical about assigning research projects without a final paper, but student engagement in the serious process of research more than made up for the lack of writing papers, as one student's journal clearly shows:

From a Discovery Project Log Book: CIA Plot to Assassinate Castro

(Week 4) I was frustrated last week because I could only get 3 boxes of documents, and they did not have much in them. I am depending on two major sources: The 1967 IG Report and the Church Committee Report. A lot of the other documents in the boxes are summaries, because the CIA agents did not keep notes during the operations.

(Week 9) I copied five documents focusing on the plot that involved Sam Giancana and the mob. They were all classified as secret. This one was really interesting because it was planned at the same time JFK was killed, so it was abruptly cut off....I want to make my project tell a clear story. I figured out that I need to create a time line, and I want to split my project board into a few categories—maybe by the different assassination plots, but I'm not sure yet.

(Week 11) I have learned a tremendous amount about doing individual research and coping with the frustrations of the National Archives. I have been there twice a week for the whole semester—that's a lot of work! I would never have thought of the Archives as such a great resource before this project, but now I would definitely like to do this kind of research again. There are 1000 other things I would like to research here!

The faculty role in these projects was to establish the professional links and points of entrance that their students needed to be able to move into onsite study. From the National Institutes of Health (life sciences), to the National Zoo (environmental studies), to the National Gallery and the Kennedy Center (arts), students from the different programs discovered how knowledge is created, valued, and preserved.

Metropolitan Washington/Baltimore: Sites for Insights

UMCP is fortunate to be situated in one of the most culturally rich and diverse urban environments in the country. The Washington-Baltimore metropolitan area boasts unique features, including the incomparable Smithsonian Institution, historic national monuments and park sites, and national research institutes and archives. Baltimore has a world-class aquarium, the Baltimore Inner Harbor, and a "Little Italy" that draws people into its unself-consciously ethnic vitality. While the Baltimore/Washington area is unique in many ways, the more important point is that almost any city can be used as an extended classroom, with the right faculty preparation and thoughtful curriculum development. The three projects that have been described here (flexible colloquia, service learning, and discovery projects) are models that can be adapted to other metropolitan sites across the country and designed to take advantage of the uniqueness of each particular urban setting.

That being said, the curricular connections of the type described above do not just "happen." Typically, unless faculty have been directly involved in a success-

ful off-campus learning experience with their students, they are very hesitant, even resistant, to planning one. The usual questions arise: How do we carve out the time (several consecutive hours on one day)? Who arranges for transportation? Who pays? What kind of liability do we incur if we take students on a field trip? Is it worth the extra effort? Furthermore, without administrative support, both in terms of logistics and faculty rewards, faculty will have little incentive to invest the time commitment necessary to infuse these learning activities into the curricula.

Faculty in the CPS program learned from each other and supported each other as they explored this new venue for teaching and learning. Like students, who might be reluctant to try something new until their peer group joins them, faculty, too, need peer support for these activities. For students to take advantage of the resources, they need to be both mentored and motivated into venturing beyond the campus. Learning to get around a new city by public transportation is as empowering as learning to use an electronic search application in a library. Faculty and program administrators need to be more aware of the invisible barriers that discourage students from moving beyond the campus perimeter into the city, and of ways to make specific accommodations to address those barriers.

Typically, both faculty and students assume that all teaching and learning experiences must take place within traditional block-scheduled courses that meet on campus at specified times. Like high school teachers who find themselves constrained by a 45-minute class period (and have thus, over time, created knowledge chunks and experiences in 45-minute segments), college professors and instructors have been conditioned to think of the campus experience as limited to the campus footprint on the map. Ironically, they would never confine their own research and explorations to the campus library, or to classroom buildings. Rather, archeologists go to dig sites, social scientists do field work, literature scholars attend Shakespeare's plays, and zoologists go to the animals.

Unfortunately, undergraduates are not usually treated to this kind of active learning. The reasons are varied, and both obvious and obscure. It is difficult for a professor in one discipline to require students to skip classes to take extended time away from campus without imposing unrealistic time commitments on students. However, when faculty work in cross-disciplinary teams there is a better chance that together they can carve out time for extended learning activities. Transportation is not obvious, nor are funds generally available even if a faculty member wanted to plan a "field trip." Buses, schedules, fees, and liability disclaimers make an administrative headache for faculty who have good intentions but too little time and get few rewards for these activities in the general scheme of things.

Yet change is possible, and is desirable when the intended outcomes are realized. College Park Scholars came through with a 93 percent retention rate after the first year. Students in the Scholars programs have had consistently higher GPAs in their freshman year compared to academically similar students who were not in the program. What appears to be clear is that the high level of faculty-student interaction in the CPS has had predictable payoffs in student success and retention.

What was not expected was that the faculty-faculty interactions were equally important for faculty satisfaction and the success of the program. Early in the development of the College Park Scholars curriculum, a few faculty began experimenting with making connections to the metropolitan community. Once we began our innovative programming, faculty in every subject area were tempted to reach out and extend their classrooms into the city. The learning community model is most successful if it first creates a learning community of faculty. Then it can realize the unconventional opportunities that emerge when faculty begin thinking outside the box and extending learning opportunities beyond the classroom walls.

Suggested Readings

Astin, A., *What Matters in College* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1993).

Jacoby, B., *Service-Learning in Higher Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996).

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Sax, L. J., Astin, A. W., Korn, W. S. and Mahoney, K. M., "The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1997" (Los Angeles Higher Education Research Institute: UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, 1997).

NOTE: College Park Scholars web address: <http://www.inform.umd.edu/SCHOLAR>