

Running Head: Urban Service Learning and Leadership

The Urban Challenge:

Creating a Service Learning and Leadership Project at a Metropolitan University

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## **Introduction: The Urban Public Research Experience**

Researchers suggest that the mission of the modern college experience should reach beyond the confines of the traditional classroom setting by connecting campus and community life to the functions and services established by college campus student unions (Butts, 1994; Kuh, 1995; Stocum, 2000). When this charge is applied in an urban context, however, institutions of higher education should further seek to expand the learning experience of its students by connecting them to their surrounding city environments (Stocum, 2000; Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Simmons, 2002). These partnerships and opportunities inevitably assist in the development of the millennial student, who unlike students of past generations, reportedly are more politically and socially astute (Schroer & Johnson, 2003). The literature on millennial student experiences within urban public research institutions is limited; however, as this article will illustrate, service learning and civic engagement are core components of developing metropolitan student leaders in the twenty-first century.

When assessing an urban public research institution it is essential to determine its primary characteristics and how those characteristics contrast to other public institutions of higher education. Johnson and Bell (1995) suggests:

While the particular characteristics metropolitan universities share may vary from institution to institution, a single philosophy is the distinguishing feature of this evolving model for higher education. It is the commitment to interaction with the metropolitan area and the willingness to adopt a leadership role in responding to community needs through, among other things, increased emphasis on courses of study that are flexible and adaptive to changes in student demography, and research that is relevant to the well-being of the region, state, and country (p.3).

As a result, faculty members at urban public research institutions find themselves in a constant struggle to balance both their research requirements and their teaching effectiveness (Haughton,

Crick, Moore, & Nicholson, 2003). In addition, faculty members at urban public research institutions express a desire to serve as mentors for their students and to find ways that connect those students to the urban communities where these faculty members teach; however, research suggests that such mentoring and collaborative experiences may not always exist for them on metropolitan campuses (Calkins & Kelley, 2005). Undergraduate students at urban public research institutions indicate that they seek closer relationships with their professors, and look for them to bridge the gap between their individual classroom experiences and their larger urban context (Stocum, 2000). In suggesting a possible solution to these faculty and undergraduate student concerns, Stocum (2000) states that all public universities, particularly those devoted to public research, must provide an equal emphasis on the quality of research, teaching, and service, and the synergy found between these areas. As urban public research institutions move into the twenty-first century, those institutions must understand the importance of fostering collaborative efforts with undergraduate student populations in an attempt to assist them in their desire to address the social problems that they often find surrounding their campuses (Stocum, 2000).

### **The Millennial Student College Experience**

As urban public research institutions work to redefine the modern college experience, millennial students are beginning their entry into these institutions. According to DeBard (2004), millennials are defined by the following characteristics:

1. Millennials tend to feel important and special due to a sense of vitality provided by their parents. Because of this, they are seen as “builders” filled with empowerment and a sense of “civic-mindedness.”
2. Millennials have been adequately sheltered during their upbringing, and have learnt to follow rules and regulations through enforcement.
3. Millennials have a high self-esteem, which in turn, spurs optimism and confidence in their future. They have appropriately managed to negotiate levels of acceptable behavior with the expectations that others have of them.
4. Millennials are conventional, and conduct their behavior based on the societal norms that have been enforced upon them.

5. Due to the ever-growing use of cell phones and internet connections, millennials enjoy the company of others and tend to congregate and socialize. This has in turn made them more team-oriented and cooperative than their previous generations.
6. Millennials are high achievers, and expect to be held accountable.
7. Millennials also feel pressured, even if it is to succeed in their achievements and goals.

As a result of the characteristics of millennial students, universities are beginning to focus on driving their students to succeed, even if it means providing a bit of pressure and structure to their information-overloaded lives (DeBard, 2004). In order to enhance the learning environment of millennial students, Wilson (2004) suggests that active learning is fostered through cooperative and collaborative projects between peer groups coupled with faculty engagement within and beyond the classroom. Technology is also encouraged in these learning environments because millennial students tend to use this resource to solve social problems in their efforts to be more civic-minded (Wilson, 2004).

In order to appropriately address the needs of millennial students, the mission of campus and community life must shift its focus to allow these students the space to address issues and concerns faced by this generation, regardless as to whether those concerns are on college campuses, or in a more global perspective. Weinberg (2005), Dean of the college at Colgate University, suggests that students, particularly in their student organizations, should be encouraged to be innovative and find new solutions to problems. Further, Weinberg (2005) believes that incentives should be provided in the undertakings these students place upon themselves. Subsequently, allowing millennial students a sense of space, while holding them accountable for their decisions helps them to work cooperatively in solving the issues that matter most to them (Weinberg, 2005). The new demands of millennial students and the shifting missions of public research institutions have an impact on the physical structure of campus

buildings, which are requiring larger spaces to support the varying demographics found at urban public research institutions (Russell, 2004).

### **The Millennial Student Diversity Context**

Due to the changing expectations of millennial students at urban public research institutions, campus life must strive to attend to the multicultural needs set forth by the growth of diversity within this student population. Carnevale & Fry (2000) report:

“The increase in African American undergraduates will be relatively modest – from 12.8 percent of students in 1995 to 13.2 percent in 2015. Asians on campus will swell dramatically by 86 percent over the 1995 level, growing from 5.4 percent of college students to 8.4 percent. Hispanic students, too, will register large increases, from 10.6 percent of 1995 undergraduates to 15.4 percent in 2015 . . . Minority enrollment will rise both in absolute numbers of students – up about 2 million – and in percentage terms, up from 29.4 percent of undergraduate enrollment to 37.2 percent” (p.73).

This increase has already beginning to take effect at universities such as Rutgers-Newark, which for nine years, has been deemed the most diverse national university according to U.S. News & World Report (Campus Diversity, 2005).

However to truly appreciate the diversity that exists within the millennial generation, Broido (2004) suggests that student affairs practitioners must lead in the effort to assist campus life in better understanding the differences that are formed between campuses based on the demographic changes of its student body. Further, researchers also suggest that student affairs practitioners should be aware that issues of diversity may appear less controversial based on the fact that millennial students are less likely to challenge authority in an effort to follow rules and regulations (Howe & Strauss, 2000; DeBard, 2004). Broido (2004) advises that student affairs professionals move away from festive and fun approaches to diversity in an effort to further address the needs of students on their campuses. To assess and correctly evaluate these needs, Magolda (1997) challenges student affairs practitioners to create dialogues that revolve issues of

race and diversity around the principle of mutual construction of meaning to an otherwise tedious discussion. In order to deepen the dialogue, Magolda (1997) advises student affairs practitioners to, “. . . offer frameworks for exploration that students [have] not yet encountered” (p.18). The most appropriate place for such interactions and dialogues to occur for millennial undergraduate students are such areas as college student unions and student campus centers.

### **The Student Leadership & Service-Learning Experience**

To address the needs of millennial students and the diversity that they bring to campus life, research suggests that service-learning and civic engagement is beneficial to the development of their character as leaders. Eyler and Giles (1999) report that service-learning projects should include standard community service projects, but should also extend to invite students to have placement in a location in the community in which those students have an interest. According to Eyler and Giles (1999), service-learning allows students to possess a greater acknowledgement of social issues, a greater comprehensive political strategy as well as a deeper analysis of solutions to the problems that they confront. Further, service-learning opportunities, allow students to grow developmentally in their cognitive abilities, problem solving techniques, and appreciation for diversity and community awareness (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Bentley & Ellison, 2005). Subsequently, service-learning should directly parallel the obligation felt by the millennial student who requires a more hands-on approach to discovering solutions to the social problems that they face in the present and in the future (Wilson, 2004).

One of the strongest models of leadership that supports the notion of service-learning is the social change model of leadership development. The social change model of leadership (1996) is organized according to the seven C's of leadership development:

- **Conscious of self** means being aware of the beliefs, values, attitudes, and emotions that motivate one to take action.

- **Congruence** refers to thinking, feeling, and behaving with consistency, genuineness, authenticity, and honesty towards others.
- **Commitment** is the psychic energy that motivates the individual to serve and that drives the collective effort. Commitment implies passion, intensity, and duration.
- **Collaboration** is to work with others in a common effort. Collaboration empowers each individual best when there is a clear-cut “division of labor.”
- **Common Purpose** means to work with shared aims and values. Common purpose is best achieved when all members of the group share in the vision and participate actively in articulating the purpose and goals of the leadership development activity.
- **Controversy with Civility** recognizes two fundamental realities of any creative group effort: that differences in viewpoint are inevitable, and that such differences must be aired openly but with civility. Civility implies respect for others, a willingness to hear each other’s views, and the exercise of restraint in criticizing the views and actions of other. Controversy can often lead to new, creative solutions to problems, especially when it occurs in an atmosphere of civility, collaboration, and common purpose.
- **Citizenship** is the process whereby the individual and the collaborative group become responsibly connected to the community and the society through the leadership development activity.

By integrating the social change model along with service-learning, it is expected that students will become more civically engaged. In addition, the collaboration of these initiatives help undergraduate students in particular to strive to become strong leaders within their communities.

### **The Student Union Experience**

Student unions often sit at the nexus of campus life at most urban public research institutions. Further, student unions potentially serve as the most appropriate place for facilitating the exploration of dialogues and programming concerning diversity and the issues confronting the millennial student. Traditionally, student unions served as a political training ground during the early nineteenth century, but they have since evolved into areas that are charged with capturing leadership development, campus involvement, and academic growth of

college students outside of their classroom (Butts, 1994). Butts (1994) states, “In planning facilities, consider fully that a [student] union is no longer merely a place to eat and meet, but has to do broadly with the constructive employment of student time outside the classroom, [and] that it represents an experience in the way of living” (p.143). For an urban public research institution, these vital experiences must include an outreach to the surrounding community as well as the facilitation of dialogues and constructive programming to meet the needs of millennial students.

As the concept of the student union makes progress into the twenty-first century, its physical characteristics have been intensely reevaluated to parallel its growth in the out-of-classroom experience. Taft (2005) reports that student unions have become an attractive tool for recruiting and retention, by offering operations such as ‘rapid-response’ food services, retail operations geared toward the millennial student population, one-stop shopping for all student services, multipurpose spaces, and even satellite union buildings. The creation of such venues helps in meeting the needs of the millennial generation, who reportedly need things quickly, logical, and fast-paced (DeBard, 2004). In addition, outside of its physical structure, student unions in the twenty-first century are becoming thriving centers that assist in the preparations of student leaders, who are civically astute and who develop as productive citizens.

### **The Rutgers University-Newark Campus Experience**

Situated on thirty-five acres in a downtown metropolis, one of the most interesting characteristics of Rutgers-Newark is its urban setting. Additionally, the institution has faced challenges in developing and maintaining relationships in the city where it is located. Newark, New Jersey, is a city which comprises a population that consists of 27 percent White, 53 percent African American, 1 percent Asian, and 19 percent Latino as well as a variety of other races and

ethnicities (Newark City, 2000). In reflection to the demographics of the city, Rutgers-Newark itself, hosts over 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students with an additional 3,681 graduate students of which 33 percent are White, 17 percent are African American, 20 percent are Asian, 14 percent are Latino, and 16 percent are foreign students (Rutgers-Newark Statistics, 2005; Rutgers Fact Book, 2005). Stocum (2000) indicates that urban universities such as Rutgers-Newark face a major challenge because they are expected to educate large numbers of students with diverse academic backgrounds while [most often doing so] with minimum state investment.” Further, urban public research institutions are less likely to gain financial support from alumni; develop entrepreneurial relationships with surrounding businesses; or secure philanthropic donations from private donors (Manzo, 2005). Barbara Jacoby (2000) suggests that the challenge faced by students at public urban universities is a lack of residential housing which forces many students to commute long distances in an effort to reach the campus. In addition, urban college students are burdened with heavy class and work schedules which hampers their sense of belonging to their university (Jacoby, 2000). Consequently, in order to meet the social developmental needs of its students and their abilities to connect to the services and programs offered at their universities, public urban institutions must seek to actively engage these students through a level of involvement and participation in campus life activities.

Building on its characteristics as an urban public research institution and in an effort to meet the developmental needs of its urban students, Rutgers-Newark has worked to establish vibrant relationships with its surrounding metropolis. Provost Steven J. Diner, chief administrative officer on the Newark campus of Rutgers University, reveals in his annual report, his vision for the expansion of the university’s academic programs by connecting them to the booming economic growth of the downtown Newark area (Rutgers Fact Book, 2005). Further,

Diner expresses that an increase of student housing on campus will serve to make stronger bonds with the surrounding city by jointly increasing campus and community life (Rutgers Fact Book, 2005). Diner reports that student life coupled with the emerging resources of the city, “[work] vigorously to create a livelier campus life by engaging more and more students in activities beyond the classroom.” (Rutgers Fact Book, 2005) In providing these opportunities, Rutgers-Newark seeks to develop its undergraduate students into civically engaged leaders who connect and expand their college experiences to the larger community within which those students reside.

### **The Rutgers-Newark Leadership Project: Re-New Leads Pilot**

Beyond merely providing internships for students within urban development studies, urban public research institutions must enrich learning communities, and develop partnerships with the community by renewing a student’s engagement within those communities (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). Based in part on the increased expectations of the millennial student and the need to foster their development, particularly within diverse urban environments, it was determined by the staff in the Paul Robeson Campus Center that as a metropolitan institution we needed to better connect our student leaders to civic engagement and service-learning opportunities within the larger Newark community. Bringle and Hatcher (1996) state:

Universities have valuable resources (for example, students, faculty, staff, classrooms, libraries, technology, and research expertise) that become accessible to the community when partnerships address community needs. They also have a tradition of serving their communities by strengthening the economic development of the region, addressing educational and health needs of the community, and contributing to the cultural life of the community (p.24).

Further, by creating and fostering relationships with the community, metropolitan universities can expand upon issues of diversity and citizenship by crossing the borders of the classroom experience and involving students in the real issues that face urban communities (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). The final determination to develop the pilot program was made after assessment

data revealed that the Paul Robeson Campus Center needed to focus its effort on three critical components of student life: 1) publicizing the union and its activities, 2) enhancing student life and leadership opportunities for the campus, and 3) improving the overall effectiveness of the union's programs.

After assessing the needs of student life on campus as well as the impending needs of the millennial student generation, Rutgers-Newark created an initiative to develop student leaders by building upon their learning experiences outside of the classroom. The initiative was named the Rutgers-Newark Leads (RU-NEW LEADS) project, and the goal of the initiative was to address the concerns of a diverse student population on the campus, while also supporting the focus of a public research institution within an urban context. It was determined that the mission of RU-NEW LEADS would create urban, empowered communities of civic-minded persons, who were committed to being life long leaders. The students who participant in the project agreed that their vision was to produce leaders through captured instruction methods versus relying on the belief that leadership was a trait that an individual was born processing. Through a joint agreement between administrators and students it was agreed upon that each participate of the program would attend a team building retreat, five subsequent council meetings, and be required to participate in several civic engagement projects.

The pilot program consisted of forty student leaders who were members of over thirty different organizations. Initially, it was also determined that students should be provided an incentive for participating in the program. As a result, a collaborative effort was begun with the Follett Bookstore and Aramark Dining Services to help provide those incentives. Follett agreed to provide a 10 percent discount on all purchases made by RU-NEW LEADS participants. In addition, Follett also provided each participant of the program text book vouchers to help off-set

the cost of their books for the entire year. Aramark worked with university administrators to provide participants of the program with additional flex dollars that the students could use in any of the dining facilities on campus. Aramark also sponsored several of the council meetings and provided participants with pizzas and sodas.

The council meetings consisted of development workshops that fostered and enhanced five primary areas: 1) Leadership Style Assessments, 2) Student Leadership Strengths and Weaknesses, 3) Internal and External Motivations for Student Leaderships, 4) Success and Challenges of Urban Leadership, and 5) the Importance of Community Building within an Urban Context. These council meetings were held bi-weekly and were facilitated by an undergraduate intern, who had been a successful student leader the previous year. The actual outreach/ community initiatives consisted of various programs that served to connect the students to the larger Newark community. These outreach initiatives included: 1) helping to build homes about three blocks from the campus through Habitat for Humanity; 2) engaging with local businesses such as Verizon in a “City Walk for Literacy” program; 3) Working with a local juvenile delinquency group to provide an on-campus orientation series; 4) providing relief services in times of national and international crises, such as a hurricane and earthquake disaster that occurred during the year of the program; and 5) adopting a local elementary school and providing tutoring services. Further, the program worked with secondary institutions in an effort to develop future student leaders by linking campus student organizations with secondary student organizations. The intent of these initiatives were to create leaders who understood the principle that effective leaders must also be prepared to provide the community with some form of altruistic service.

## Conclusion

The intent of the RU-NEW LEADS program was to not only develop student leaders who were active on campus but to foster those leaders growth potential by encouraging student leaders to reach beyond the boundaries of the campus. By creating these links, the program fostered student leaders who felt a sense of empowerment and who believed that they could make a difference within their community and the world. This sense of empowerment was clearly noticed as we analyzed the personal reflection journals at the end of the year:

I plan on staying in touch with other student leaders, learning from them, reading multiple leadership books from [Re-New Leads] as well as a class I'm taking, and I will learn to apply these leadership skills. *Student Leadership Retreat*

I envision a community of students who are inspired to do service and advocate for social justice. *Shared Vision Leadership Council Meeting*

I take risks, but I don't believe in failure. Failure is not giving your self the opportunity to succeed. Learning is a big part of success. If I learn to do it better or different, then I'll never fail. *Challenge the Process Leadership Council Meeting*

Such statements helped the program to determine that it was indeed on track in regards to providing opportunities for students who lived, worked and studied within an urban context to share their experiences as leadership with various members of their metropolitan communities.

The most significant measure of success came as the result of acknowledgement from the Chief Administrative Officer on the Newark campus:

This commitment to opportunity is shared not only by our faculty and staff but by our student leadership. More than 30 student organizations, groups as diverse as the History Club, the Christian Fellowship, and the Gay and Lesbian Alliance, have signed up to work in projects that provide services to low-income people in our surrounding community. Supported by the [Paul Robeson Campus Center], these students greeted arriving Central High School students on the first day of school, and are working with Habitat for Humanity to build a house three blocks from campus. *Steven J. Diner, Provost, Provost's Annual Address 2005.*

We learned from this experience that once students begin to feel a sense of empowerment and civic-mindedness it ultimately helps to mold them into productive citizens who developed a compassionate spirit for humanity. We strongly believed at Rutgers-Newark that this was an important facet in fostering the development of the millennial generation, particularly for those students who were engaged within a metropolitan setting. Further, we learned that by engaging these students within their urban environments versus attempting to shelter them from those settings helped to foster a new era of innovative leaders both on and off campus.

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