

1.5 History of Service-Learning in the United States⁹

The concept of service-learning dates back to 1862 when President Abraham Lincoln passed and signed the First Morrill Act that would support and maintain a college where the focus would be to promote practical education of a variety of pursuits and professions. Community service and civic engagement have a long history on American campuses beginning in the 19th century and finding revitalization in the 1960s, 1980s, and today.

The term ‘service-learning’ was coined in 1967 by educators Robert Sigmon and William Ramsey. In 1969, service-learning scholars and participants concerned with higher education and community service met in Atlanta to discuss the pros and cons of service-learning and the importance of implementing these types of programs in American colleges and universities. Since that first conference, higher education and community educators have continued to advocate for best practices and ideas for service-learning.

Service-learning during the 1960s was marked by numerous initiatives. Governmental initiatives during this time included the creation of the Peace Corps, VISTA, college-work-study, and the White House Fellows program. In addition, the Union Corps emerged, along with state government internship programs. In higher education, learning became further linked to service through professional clinical training, experiments, and connections to practice settings.

During the 1970s, the concept of service learning evolved even further. The government formed the Action Agency in 1971, and the White House Conference on Youth report called for a solid link between service and learning. In 1972, Area Health Education Centers received extended funding for manpower training into rural and community settings in order for students to be able to learn and serve at the same time. In 1979 the National Student Volunteer Program became the National Center for Service-Learning. Specific to higher education, the Urban Semester Program emerged and private colleges created specialized service-learning programs. It was during the 1970s that research on experiential learning and service-learning increased, and associations focusing on these concepts emerged.

The 1980s introduced various modern developments that are integral to the service-learning concept. For example, an increase in numbers could be noted in secondary school service and learning programs and the Campus Outreach Opportunity League was formed in 1984. Notably the Campus Compact, which supports ASL in higher education, was formed by college presidents in 1985. In addition, the Points of Light Foundation began to honor service providers, and National Youth Leadership Council was formed. Colleges and high schools continued forth with programming and affiliations that were previously created. The concept of using spring and fall breaks for service emerged in the 1980s as well. 1987 marked the creation of the Carnegie Unit on service. In 1989, over

⁹ Adapted from *Sigmon, R. (1996). Journey to service-learning: Experiences from independent liberal arts colleges and universities. Washington, D.C.*

70 organizations collaborated to produce ten principles of good practice in service-learning, which are described in the next section.

The time period from the 1990s to the present marked several milestones in the history of service-learning. The National and Community Service Act of 1990 was passed. In addition, the National Service Bill was passed in 1993 which led to the development of AmeriCorps and other programs which linked service to learning. Campus Compact greatly expanded during this time period, which resulted in an increased level of state organizations, national institutes, journals, and members. St. Norbert College joined Campus Compact in 1991, and the Wisconsin Campus Compact in 2004. The Stanford Service-Learning Institute was created in 1994, and dozens of state, regional, and national conferences and workshops encompassing service and learning were organized. Overall, there was an emergence of civic arts and a citizenship education focus in higher education. During this time, the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development also endorsed the importance of linking service and learning. Publications focusing on service-learning increased, including Campus Compact publications and the Michigan Journal for Community Service-Learning. The CIC Serving to Learn/Learning to Serve project, which included the National Institute on Learning and Service in Chicago, began during this time. The AAHE National Conference emerged, in addition to the Ford Foundation /United Negro College Fund Community Service Partnership Project. Through the work of the University of Colorado Peace Studies Center, a service-learning network on the Internet evolved. These developments have supported an increasing number of service-learning programs in higher education institutions.