

Changing the Campus Colloquy Paradigm

An Experiment in Creating a Culture of Service

BY TAMMY MCGUIRE

While the concept of service learning is usually applied to individual classroom experiences, this case study of how Pacific Union College (Angwin, California), incorporated the idea of service into its Campus Colloquy program illustrates how the principles of service learning can be expanded to campus-wide programs.

Development

In 2003, concerned about poor attendance at weekly chapels and believing the entire campus community should meet together at least once a week, Pacific Union College (PUC) President Richard Osborn proposed an inclusive chapel program for the PUC community. Every Thursday from 10:00-10:50 a.m., employees and students would be invited to come together to worship, learn, and exchange ideas and information. Later that year, the faculty and staff of PUC showed their support by voting to begin offering academic credit for the Thursday Campus Colloquy. Students would be required to attend six of each quarter's 10 colloquies and would be graded on a Pass/Fail basis.

Previously, the Campus Colloquy had been one of the many programs for which students might earn what was colloquially known on campus as "worship credits." The Campus Colloquy's current purpose statement captures the paradigm shift—rather than defining the program primarily as a "worship" service, it would become an intellectual and academic experience as well:

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"Campus Colloquy is designed to be a time when the entire campus community comes together. The idea is to explore together from a Christian perspective new horizons in art, music, intellect, religion, spirituality, service opportunities, cultures, and even our own community here at PUC. We hope to learn, to celebrate, to exchange new ideas, and to worship together."

This purpose statement does not denigrate the value of worshipping together as an Adventist collegiate community, but rather invites social, political, and cultural topics into the conversation, and thus attempts to integrate faith and learning in both its purposes and programming. By expanding the boundaries of a traditional

"worship" program, the Colloquy Planning Committee could also highlight a number of venues for service learning. Since one of PUC's stated objectives is to foster a "culture of service," it seemed like an excellent plan to use the campus-wide colloquy program to help achieve this goal, and to focus its programming on service.

However, this seemingly subtle change from "chapel" to "colloquy" had numerous implications. By moving into the realm of academics, Campus Colloquy acquired the accoutrements of other scholarly endeavors: the need for (1) student learning objectives; (2) a means of assessment; and (3) a syllabus laying out the goals, expectations, and policies of the course.

How, then, are the concept of service learning and a campus-wide colloquy related? While the term "service learning" certainly can be interpreted in a number of different ways, the Na-



David Batstone, professor of ethics at the University of San Francisco and author of seven books, speaks at a 2008 Colloquy. His inspiring call to combat modern-day slavery and human trafficking inspired REVO, a grassroots movement conceived and led by PUC students.

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syllabus was developed, distributed to each student, and posted on the school’s course management system. The Campus Colloquy syllabus outlined the purpose and objectives of the course, the schedule of events, and the course policies (i.e., attendance guidelines, academic honesty, etc.).

Implementation

How, specifically, were the service themes addressed in PUC’s 2007-2008 Campus Colloquy programming? For the first quarter’s emphasis on a “Sense of Vision,” we heard from speakers living lives of service in a variety of arenas: Father John Brenkle from the St. Helena Catholic church has worked heroically to improve migrant housing in the Napa Valley; the Honorable Alan Nakanishi, California Assemblyman, uncompromisingly serves in the political arena; Dick Duerksen passionately promotes Maranatha’s opportunities for volunteers to participate in building projects from South Dakota to Mozambique.

The second quarter line-up of memorable speakers offered powerful reminiscences of the Martin Luther King march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1965 (told by Bill Knott and participant Milton Hare, a PUC student during that momentous year). Amnesty International sponsored “Voices From Darfur” featuring two survivors from the war-torn region who poignantly reflected on their experiences in that African conflict. Students heard how successful Napa Valley entrepreneurs lived lives of service. A vintner, insurance agent, and mountaineer/vinegar businessman shared their passions: providing wheelchairs to Nepal’s Sherpas, supporting orphanages in Russia, and raising funds to improve the local hospital. All reiterated the quarter’s theme “A Sense of Purpose.” Said Phil

Pacific Union College’s chapter of Amnesty International sponsored “Voices From Darfur,” a national speaking tour. Above, a survivor from the conflict in Sudan shares his firsthand account during a Colloquy program.

tional Youth Leadership Council captures its salient aspects in defining the concept as “a philosophy, pedagogy, and model for community development that is used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards.” Since PUC’s 2007-2008 Campus Colloquy would focus on “service,” this empowered the planners to apply the principles of service learning to the program.

Most definitions of “service learning” allow for a broad definition of the term “service.” In the case of PUC’s Colloquy, campus Chaplain Roy Ice drafted a proposal that focused on a particular aspect of service each quarter. The thematic objectives listed below include both the desired impact (i.e., learning outcomes) for those who attended the Campus Colloquy and the “instructional strategies” by which we sought to achieve these goals.

FALL – A Sense of Vision: Our perception of what we can do to positively impact the world is broadened. We are challenged to see ourselves as the bearers of valuable resources and to be inspired by examples of passionate service. Speakers are invited who will share with us their experiences in the realm of service.

WINTER – A Sense of Purpose: We are introduced to local organizations/individuals who have chosen as their main life purpose to serve humanity. We are encouraged to join local organizations both now and in our post-PUC lives, with the expressed objective of living a life of purpose. Speakers are invited because of their connection with organizations/services that demonstrate or introduce current opportunities for us to give of our time and talents in order to serve humanity.

SPRING – A Sense of Pride: We celebrate those who have acted upon their noble vision and who have placed service to others above their own interests. We will be encouraged by programs that present awards and highlight the characteristics that PUC would like instilled in all students. The intentional celebration of positive actions is designed to motivate us to action.

With these goals in mind, the Colloquy Planning Committee met and carefully planned each program to address the quarter’s theme in some way. As for any other academic class, a



Students peruse a table filled with CDs, books, and other wares donated by fellow students, staff, and community members for the REVO fundraiser.



Inspired by the student-led REVO movement, one of the PUC Sabbath school classes donated \$1,000 to the cause.

Toohy, owner of Sparrow Lane Farms, “We need our creed to be, ‘We will leave this world better than what we had.’”

In the spring quarter, reports on student service projects and a series of talks by former emergency room physician Matthew Sleeth, author of the book *Serve God, Save the Planet*, highlighted the spirit of service that changes lives for both the giver and the receiver.

Assessment

In the academic realm, it is not enough to plan or to program well; one must also implement valid and reliable procedures for assessing whether the learning objectives have been met. Assessment can be a particularly daunting task when the objectives are difficult to measure. For example, it is a complex task to empirically assess how the Campus Colloquy programs have affected students’ perceptions of how they can “positively change the world.” Similarly, knowing whether those who attend Colloquy have been inspired to join an existing service organization with “the expressed objective of living a life of purpose” is a challenging mandate.

The need for a systematic assessment of Campus Colloquy was heightened by the rigorous accreditation process conducted by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). One of the mantras of this accrediting body is its call for institutions to establish a “culture of evidence” to assess how well objectives have been met. This standard applies equally to traditional course work and non-standard academic classes such as Campus Colloquy that have clearly designed objectives (i.e., establishing a sense of vision, a sense of purpose, and a sense of pride regarding living a life of service) but no clearly defined means of assessing how well these objectives have been met.

PUC’s Colloquy Planning Committee elected to meet this challenge by asking students to evaluate Campus Colloquy much in the same manner that they do their other courses. A survey was set up on PUC’s course management system that included items such as “Colloquy has provided me with a sense of vision for what I can do to positively impact the world,” “As

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a result of Colloquy, I have become more involved in service projects this year,” etc. Students responded using a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). The survey also included open-ended questions such as “What specific suggestions do you have for making Colloquy more meaningful?”

The assessment instrument provides a snapshot from the students’ perspective of how successful the colloquy program has been in meeting its stated objectives, but as shown in the following section, it supplies only part of the picture.

Outcomes

The results of the assessment instrument suggest that while the Campus Colloquy programs may have inspired students with positive examples of service, they did not necessarily influence them to act in specific ways. For example, nearly 52 percent of the respondents said they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “The speakers and programs have helped me see the importance of moral and ethical commitments to neighbor, society, and the natural world.” However, when asked whether they had become involved in service projects this year as a result of colloquy, only 13 percent agreed or strongly agreed. These results suggest that while Campus Colloquy helps inspire students to live lives of service, it’s difficult to determine whether they actually put this inspiration into practice.

In May of 2008, Campus Colloquy planners obtained anecdotal evidence that proved difficult to dismiss even though it fell outside the bounds of formal assessment measures. This evidence came in the form of REVO (short for Revolution), a well-organized and entirely student-generated project that inspired the entire campus. Its slogan is “We’re not waiting for the world to change.” It even has a Website (<http://www.myspace.com/REVOPUC>), and a YouTube promotional video



REVO's student-run benefit sale featured hundreds of items donated by students, faculty, and community members. Proceeds went to David Batstone's "Not for Sale" project, building a shelter and vocational center for trafficked and abused children in Lima, Peru.

(<http://www.youtube.com/revopuc>). But most important, it had a cause: provide a home and vocational center for abused and formerly slave-trafficked children in Lima, Peru. As of this writing, REVO has raised more than \$10,000.

REVO is an important part of this story because its genesis can be traced back to a Campus Colloquy program given by David Batstone, professor of ethics at the University of San Francisco. It was graphic design major Rachel Thompson who, inspired by Dr. Batstone's "Not For Sale" campaign to stop human trafficking, determined to do something to help. She was soon joined by dozens of other students who organized, marketed, and planned an on-campus event attended by hundreds of students, faculty, staff, and community members. The all-day festivities included poetry readings, a concert, and a fashion show highlighting student designs.

The cornerstone of the event, however, was the benefit sale of donated items by students, faculty, and others. Commented Rachel in an interview with PUC's campus paper, "[This is] not just the junk we've been meaning to get rid of. We're mindfully considering the material objects that matter to us, and we're giving those up, even if it's just one thing. In parting with our possessions, our goal is to—through the feeling of sacrifice—experience a very personal connection to our cause." The outpouring of sacrificial giving included items ranging from clothes to I-pods to guitars, and even kayaks to be sold or auctioned at the REVO event.

The inspiration for this type of energetic, creative, and successful response to a social cause might be triggered by something other than an inspiring speaker, but the genesis of REVO at Pacific Union College shows that a focus on service in Campus Colloquy can inspire, motivate, and empower students to put into practice Christ's call to serve others.



Colloquy speaker Matthew Sleeth, author of *Serve God, Save the Planet*, points out the tension between the spiritual obligation to care for the Earth and the secular pull of a consumer lifestyle.

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Challenges

Incorporating service learning into a broad college-wide program such as Campus Colloquy does not come without its challenges.

The first proved to be the nature of Colloquy itself. The assessment surveys revealed that a large number of students expressed resentment at being required to attend, and intimated that this factor affected their willingness to engage with the speakers and programs. In other words, requiring attendance at such events may influence students' receptiveness to messages that seek to inspire them to dedicate their lives to service. Such a result was not surprising, given the general resistance of young (and many older) adults to mandatory attendance requirements. The fact that "regular" academic classes' attendance requirements do not engender similar resistance indicates that reframing Campus Colloquy as an academic requirement at PUC has not yet been entirely successful.

From a pragmatic standpoint, planning and scheduling



REVO volunteers, wearing student-designed T-shirts, celebrate the event's success.

speakers and/or programs that have broad appeal to students, that provide inspirational and life-changing opportunities, and that are of consistent exemplary quality remains an ongoing challenge.

Going Forward: Responding to Challenges

At the time this article was written, PUC was refining and strengthening its Campus Colloquy program for the new school year. The guiding theme for 2008-2009 is "Community." Once again, each quarter's programming focus is on a particular element of the theme:

- Fall: Campus Community
- Winter: Learning Community
- Spring: Global Community

As usual, a syllabus with student learning objectives has been distributed to students. Though the theme of "Community" may not seem to relate specifically to service learning, the learning objectives for the new school year clearly highlight the importance of service in the goals for Campus Colloquy in particular and the overall campus in general. According to these objectives, students who attend and participate in Campus Colloquy will

- feel themselves to be a part of the PUC community;
- appreciate and learn from diversity at PUC;
- be inspired to practice the gospel imperative to serve others; and
- begin to understand how to integrate their faith and learning.

Finally, Campus Colloquy organizers are developing plans to make the program format more student friendly. These plans include (1) implementing more of an interview/dialogue format with guests, (2) incorporating more multimedia segments, and (3) including segments about current events, campus personalities, etc. We hope that these changes will make Campus Col-



Colloquy speaker Matthew Sleeth signs copies of his book.

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loquy more engaging for students and help mitigate the resistance noted earlier to the idea of required attendance.

What We've Learned

Through re-imagining the focus and purpose of our Campus Colloquy program, we have learned some important lessons about creating a culture of service. While not all educational institutions may schedule once-a-week programs for the entire school family, the lessons apply to those who wish to establish a culture of service both in and out of the classroom:

1. Have a precise vision of the meaning of "service."
2. Develop a clear idea about what, exactly, the programming is to accomplish.
3. Assiduously make programming choices based on the vision and goals.
4. Make your vision and goals public.
5. Assess your success (vision and goals).
6. Move forward based on that assessment.

There are doubtless many ways and means of creating a culture of service that permeates every part of a campus. Service learning encompasses more than just classroom applications. The lessons from the paradigm shift of PUC's Campus Colloquy illustrate that by emphasizing service in a variety of ways, a school can inspire and educate students to become agents of change. ☞



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