



College Leadership Conference



Community Arts Workshops

Environmental Action



Developing

by Andrea Johnson

2

I told them they were communication consultants and I was their CEO. **They smiled at me.** I told them they would be working for real clients from non-profit organizations. **They stared at me.** I told them they would have to complete a project that would satisfy the client's needs. **They looked at each other.** I told them they would spend a great deal of time on-site with their client. **They looked at the door. A lot. In panic.**

Each time I taught "Communication Consulting," those first 15 minutes evoked consistent responses from my students. At the end of the semester, another scene invariably played out. First, the students presented their products — brochures, annual reports, slide shows, video scripts, display boards. Next, they described their clients. They spoke knowledgeably about the homeless, the hungry, battered women, parents who batter, people with disabilities, children with fatal illnesses, senior citizens who need companions.

The students met the course goals of using communication theories and technology in a work setting while connecting and contributing to the community. But they accomplished more than that: They were learning to serve and serving to learn.

A mission of community service

From its beginnings over a century ago, Alverno College has emphasized having strong connections to community. The college's mission clearly states: "To prepare students for their professions and for the responsibilities of citizenship, Alverno builds relationships benefiting students with business, industry and community institutions."

For more than 20 years, the eight abilities — particularly the ability of effective citizenship — have provided the structure for creating and sustaining these ties to the community. Demonstrating the effective citizenship ability means that students have opportunities to try out their developing citizenship skills.

My students' experiences convinced me that immersion in the community, when backed by an academic structure and ongoing instructor support, produces valuable results: strong discipline learning, interest in giving service, and the fortitude to question assumptions about those who are served.

As I talked with my colleagues, I learned that similar kinds of controlled community immersion were happening in other Alverno classrooms, and that there has been a growing movement within colleges

Developing Global Perspectives



Voter Registration



Community Involvement

Effective Citizens

and universities to integrate service into the curriculum. The term that has evolved to name this process is "service-learning."

What is service-learning?

In 1994, Alverno became a member of the Service-Learning Alliance when the college was awarded one of 30 grants distributed by the Council of Independent Colleges to examine and to develop service-learning in the curriculum. The college welcomed the opportunity to engage in a self-study that would track examples of service-learning already in place, and open campus-wide discussions about philosophies and approaches to service-learning.

On the national scene there was widespread support for the idea of having students perform service in a community setting, but definitions of such service-learning and how it operates have varied widely. For the most part, practitioners inside and outside of Alverno have agreed that service-learning includes these elements:

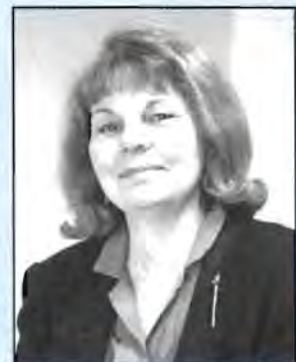
- Students actively participate in an organized community setting;
- The activity meets the needs of that community;
- The service is part of a structured curriculum;

- Students reflect on their experiences.

The Alverno faculty and academic support staff who acted as the ad hoc hub for the grant work recognized that the college needed to engage in its own dialogs in order to share a common vision of service-

Continued on page 5 ▶▶▶

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Effective Citizenship (continued)

learning. After months of conversations through cross-discipline discussions, open forums and survey questionnaires, the college's unique approach to service-learning emerged.

- **Assessment** is the key to evaluating a student's service-learning performance. Instructors create criteria for each assessment so that a student has a clear understanding of what she needs to know and do in order to complete the work successfully. The service component is explicitly and closely linked to the discipline theories taught in the course.

- **Substantive participation** means more than the student showing up at a service site and doing what she is told to do for a given number of hours. It implies an aware and informed engagement with the goals of the organization and the ability to adapt to those goals.

- **Service can be mandatory** or freely given; it can be paid or unpaid; it can be enjoyable or not!

- **Service opportunities** may be found in a student's professional, civic, social and academic communities, or even in her own family. Limiting the definition of "community" means limiting the ways in which our students can serve.

Alverno's developmental approach to learning

In Alverno's curriculum, the ability of effective citizenship is considered a primary home for service-learning. Since a structure already exists for developing effective citizenship, service-learning can be integrated into every discipline, and can be assessed across the curriculum.



Photo by Lila Ayyun

Assessors listen attentively as students discuss how to prevent young people from joining gangs.

Effective Citizenship: Levels 1 and 2

Every weekday student at Alverno College takes "RC 200: The American Experience," usually during her third or fourth semester. The one-credit course is a formal step in helping students to develop and demonstrate two abilities that are critical to learning to serve: taking global perspectives and effective citizenship.

"It's a very simple framework," said Muriel Plichta, assistant professor of education and coordinator of the RC 200 assessment. "The course gives students practice in observing, analyzing and making judgments about global and local issues. It enables students to move into what it means to be a globally aware, effective citizen."

Before enrolling in RC 200, each student must have completed introductory courses in the natural and behavioral sciences (including arts and humanities), psychology and social science.

In the course, each student chooses an issue and takes it through four stages:

- 1) **Becoming aware** of the issue and what she already knows about it;
- 2) **Gathering information**, and interpreting and analyzing it;

- 3) **Making judgments** about the information and how to use it, including making recommendations;
- 4) **Practicing public talk** and getting involved in strategies to deal with the issue.

At the end of the course, students are assigned another issue; currently, the issue is street gangs. They have about a week to think about and gather information on the issue. Then they come to the assessment.

External assessors — community people who are trained by Alverno — observe as students work in small groups to share and analyze information, and use it to make recommendations on how to prevent young people from joining gangs. Then students must present their recommendations to a larger group, and come to consensus on recommendations.

"I really enjoy this assessment, because there is so much emphasis on tying together the things the students have learned in their classes," said Dan Fromm, a retired Delco Electronics executive who has been assessing students at Alverno since 1989. "It's also an opportunity for students to practice their group-interaction and public-speaking skills."



Effective Citizenship: Level 3

Learn how to “read the organization” in order to achieve common goals.

“When I started my internship at Harley-Davidson, I had no idea what the organization was like, how people did things, how I should act, even how I should dress,” said Tammy Subel. At the time, she was a third-year student at Alverno, majoring in business and management. Her mentor at Harley-Davidson was Jeanne Winiarski, a 1991 Alverno graduate who is manager of parts and accessories sales.

Learning to “read the organization” and find effective ways of achieving common goals is one of the purposes of the internship, called Off-Campus Experiential Learning (OCEL). This skill — the third level of Alverno’s ability of effective citizenship — can be transferred to many different situations.

“One of the goals Jeanne and I had set was to assess procedures on the sales-order line and make recommendations to improve efficiency,” Subel said. “I worked on the line myself, giving

information about parts for dealers all over the world. I took the initiative to interview people who worked on the line, and in other departments that are involved, because I wanted to see how it all worked together.

“I had some really good ideas, but in my enthusiasm, I lost track of my role in the organization. Instead of taking my recommendations to my mentor, I was trying them out with other workers on the line,” Subel said. “This caused some conflict among the workers, which was not what I wanted to do.”

OCEL students attend a weekly seminar at Alverno while they are interns. The seminar Subel attended was taught by Lucy Cromwell, professor of English, and Dawn Balistreri, assistant professor of professional communication.

“We teach students how to ‘read the organization,’” said Cromwell. “We ask questions such as:

What kind of organization is this?

Who is responsible?

How are decisions made?

Is the structure formal?

Is there also an informal structure?

What is your place in the structure?

This work, together with coaching from Winiarski, helped Subel find a more effective way of changing procedures.

“Part of the OCEL experience is learning how things work in real life, and real life is not perfect,” Winiarski said. “One of the neat things about being an OCEL mentor is that you can help complete the bridge between what the student is learning in her classes and how she can apply that in the work world.

“Tammy did a wonderful job,” Winiarski said. “She took the initiative to try to improve things, and many of her recommendations have been implemented.”

Student Tammy Subel learned to “read the organization” during her internship at Harley-Davidson.



Photo by Seipel and Barfield



Effective Citizenship (continued)

"The effective citizenship ability helped us to integrate service-learning more clearly into our curriculum," said Susan Stang, assistant professor of education. "We saw that we had peaks and valleys. Now, it makes more sense because we focused the service component and made it more explicit."

As in any complex ability, service-learning is a skill that needs to be developed over time. Driver's licenses, for example, are given only after a learner has demonstrated proficiency with the written rules as well as the operation of a vehicle. It would be unrealistic and unwise to expect that students can function effectively as service-learners without practice.

The following examples are taken from course assessments designed to develop and evaluate the Alverno student's ability to become a service-learner.

- ***Students must be able to understand complex situations and learn analytical frameworks before acting as service-learners.***

In a required introductory science course, for example, students must use the theories they are learning to investigate a local environmental problem. Each student identifies a particular concern of hers and then systematically researches the various ethical, economic and social issues that make this problem a difficult one to resolve. She interviews the people most involved in the issue, so her findings are gathered from as wide a perspective as possible. She is evaluated on her process as well as her product. By using the methods of scientific inquiry, the student develops the ability of questioning, researching and formulating responses which can then draw her into taking informed actions or service toward a community issue.

- ***Students must have an opportunity to learn about and to practice service-learning within their general education courses.***

"RC 200: The American Experience" is a course that every weekday student at Alverno takes. The box on page 5 details how students practice their service-learning skills in the assessment for that course.

- ***Students must be able to recognize the inherent complexity within the community they serve.***

The Technology Scholars Program, for example, provides opportunities for Alverno education students to serve in classrooms off and on campus.

In this project, students collaborate with K-12



Photo by Seipel and Barfield

Alverno education students staff "Girls in Technology" workshops for fifth and sixth-grade girls.

teachers from area schools in designing computer lessons that engage both boys and girls. They assist Alverno faculty in integrating technology in the classroom. They have developed and staffed an on-campus "Girls in Technology" event that assists fifth and sixth-grade girls in overcoming computer anxiety.

"The students have all demonstrated abilities in using technology," said Patsy Brooks, assistant professor of education, who coordinates the Technology Scholars Program. "But we also look for students who would be likely to benefit from the experience of serving in so many different capacities."

Each community setting presents particular challenges. The K-12 teacher may welcome the service of a skilled computer scholar in the classroom, but may be less enthusiastic about the student's input in lesson planning. Teaching fifth-grade girls to use the computer means creating a supportive and stimulating workshop environment. And working alongside their own Alverno instructors to assist them in using the latest technology could be a bit daunting.

Learning to cope with such real-life complexities is part of the service-learning process.

- ***Opportunities to test out service-learning in wider venues come from required and elective courses in the major or support area.***

In Alverno's art therapy program, for example, students move from learning how to prepare therapeutic interventions to the actual planning and implementing of art therapy activities in a community setting.

Effective Citizenship — Level 4:

Apply developing citizenship skills
in a community setting.

Why is the lever on a soda machine so high?

Because whoever designed the machine didn't think about customers who use wheelchairs.

Students in an "Advanced Writing" course at Alverno had to confront questions such as this one in order to produce a video script for a client. The client was Northpointe Achievement Center in Zion, Illinois, a non-profit agency that serves about 350 developmentally and mentally disabled adults through vocational training, a sheltered workshop, an independent-learning-skills center and a residential program.

Sally Gaca, a grant writer for Northpointe who graduated from Alverno in 1993, remembered taking the "Advanced Writing" course when she was a Weekend College student at Alverno. Her agency needed a video script to assist in teaching disabled people how to cope with the vagaries of vending machines. So Gaca asked if the class would take on Northpointe as a client.

The class instructor agreed, and students produced four pieces:

- An advertisement for an open house at the agency;
- A feature story about disabled people;
- An updated agency brochure;
- The video script described above.

"The quality of the projects was outstanding, and gave me some really good ideas," said Gaca, who attended class sessions and acted as a resource for the students. "You could see in the feature stories how the students had grown in their awareness of people with disabilities. We probably will end up using parts of several of the students' scripts to produce the videotape."

Dawn Balistreri is an assistant professor of professional communication at Alverno and instructor for the class.

"Just as there are different ways to define effective citizenship, there are different ways to access it," Balistreri explained. "In this class, the focus is on writing, and writing opens the door. The learning takes place on many levels.

"Through serving the needs of the client, our students learn about writing well, being effective citizens, and the effects both have on society," Balistreri said.

"The students become part of the loop, and learn that, through using their professional skills, they can have a positive effect on their community."

Wilma Fonseca, a senior in professional communication, was part of the class that worked on the Northpointe project.

"I have always been interested in the non-profit sector, because it deals with community issues and people and their needs," said Fonseca, who works at Milwaukee Job Center Network.

"It's usually people at the upper levels who make decisions, but sometimes they don't know what it's like to be in need. I'm a working woman of color who comes from the central city, so I know what the needs are. But at Alverno, I've gained the skills to become a decision maker. I want to be on a level where I'm making the decisions."



Photo courtesy of Northpointe Achievement Center

"Glenda," center, a Northpointe client, demonstrated the difficulty of using vending machines to Sally Gaca '93, and Alverno student, Wilma Fonseca.



Effective Citizenship (continued)

In a senior-level course, each student designs an art therapy activity appropriate to the Very Special Arts–Wisconsin Festival population. About 500 students with various disabilities, ranging in age from 3 to 21 years, come to Alverno from area elementary, middle and high schools. Art therapy and music therapy students prepare and implement arts activities with the children, providing a day of experimentation, growth and accomplishment.

Using her knowledge of art therapy, the student must explain and justify her visual-arts strategy to an external professional supervisor. She carries out her plan in multiple settings so that she must adapt it to the varying needs of different participants. In her self-evaluation, the student critiques her work and identifies in what ways the activities served festival participants and where it needed revision.

What happens after graduation?

Supporters of service-learning programs recognize that there is no one experience or set of experiences that will guarantee that students will continue to give service after graduation. Some research does suggest a positive correlation between a student's involvement with service-learning in college and giving service after college. For some students, the linkage between community and professional careers is inexorably forged.

"I want students to see how they can provide service as part of their professional role — not only in the community outside their profession," said Regina Grantz, assistant professor of business and management.

Marissa Cobb, a 1993 Alverno graduate who works as manager of fund raising and special events for Second Harvest Food Bank of Wisconsin, was deeply affected by her experiences at Alverno.

"Developing the ability of effective citizenship made me realize that *I do have* a responsibility," she said. "It definitely influenced my career choice. Pro-

essionally, I work for an organization that helps feed hungry people. I play a role in the team effort of trying to make our community better and stronger for *all* people.

"I have a real passion for my work, and I feel I can make an impact on my community," Cobb continued. "It's a really good feeling to go to bed at night and get up in the morning, knowing that what you do is important to somebody besides yourself."

An Alverno graduate will make her own choices about her role in the community. But the faculty have multiple pieces of evidence from her course work and her assessments that indicate she has the ability to be a well-informed, pro-active citizen who understands her obligation to enhance the quality of others' lives and to meet the needs of her community. She has the citizenship skills and the leadership abilities to provide service to others in personal, professional and civic arenas.

She has learned to serve.

I recently ran into a student who had taken my "Communication Consulting" class a few years ago. I recalled that she had worried about working successfully with her client, because she thought the non-profit world held no interest for her. In the end, she produced exceptional work for her client and demonstrated a remarkable knowledge of the neighborhood organization. But I worried that the experience had not really come together for her.

Our chance meeting gave me an opportunity to ask her if she remembered working with that agency. She looked a little startled, then smiled, and said: "Oh, didn't you know? I serve on their board of directors."



Art therapy students design arts activities for the Very Special Arts Program.



Putting It All Together: Pro-active Professional Service

Alverno's education faculty are developing a service-learning strand that runs throughout the education students' professional course work. The developmental sequence includes the following components.

- In the first year, students become familiar with service-learning models.

- Over the next six semesters, students forge ongoing relationships with community agencies as they move through several field placements.

- In their final year, elementary education students participate in "Coordinating Seminar." This capstone experience integrates the Alverno abilities through research of an educational issue, resulting in oral and written presentations in the context of service.

For example, in her capstone experience, Maria Gonzalez De Nunez chose to research this question: *What can teachers do to work effectively with crack/cocaine babies when they reach the classroom?*

After surveying the literature, Gonzalez De Nunez visited Mount Sinai Hospital, where she gained factual information about symptoms reported by pregnant women who use crack/cocaine. She also observed the behavior of a first-grade student, diagnosed with attention deficit disorder, whose mother admitted using crack/cocaine during pregnancy, and interviewed the child's teacher.

Finally, Gonzalez De Nunez made a presentation to staff at Twenty-Seventh Street School, where she now teaches in bilingual first grade. She summarized her findings and made recommendations for effective classroom practices.

The education department's coordinated approach suggests significant implications for students, faculty and the community.

- **Students:** The service-learning experiences offer a rich context out of which students can nurture their professional dispositions as educators to the community. By linking service

throughout their academic career, students will have the knowledge to formulate service related choices and feel empowered to make changes in their communities.

- **Faculty:** The commitment of the faculty to meet community needs is demonstrated through a strong emphasis on urban teaching and a continuous evaluation and improvement of the curriculum. The faculty's collaboration with educators, administrators, families and agencies serves as a dynamic modeling of pro-active professional service for their students.

- **Community:** The education department provides academic supports for service-learning in the greater community through multiple field experiences, including student teaching. The field experiences offer mutually beneficial relationships. Students make vital connections to learning, teaching and serving, while the schools benefit from the students' abilities to give service to their new colleagues and their very own pupils.



Community Volunteer Fair



Field Placements

Community Connections



Effective Communication