

Service learning and civic journalism in university curriculum:

A simple merger with immense potential

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A definition of service learning

Northwestern's SL committee's definition is:

Educational experiences in which students participate in the organization and execution of service activities that address campus and community involvement. Students reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility and engagement.

Some descriptions of civic journalism

Some of the top voices in journalism have described civic journalism as:

- “Helping the public find the solutions to problems, (qtd. in Steele, 2007, para. 4).
- “...a belief that journalism has an obligation to public life - an obligation that goes beyond just telling the news or unloading lots of facts. The way we do our journalism affects the way public life goes. Journalism can help empower a community or it can help disable it (Doing Civic Journalism, n.d., para. 1).

Some descriptions of civic journalism

- A type of journalism that “can improve the quality of public life in communities” (Steele, 2007, para 14) and can improve “the public capacity to solve problems” (Merritt, 1994, p. 17A).
- An active style of journalism that seeks to connect members of the media with the community, provide key information on topics that affect lives, give the community members a more meaningful voice and give journalists fulfilling civic assignments (my attempt at a definition).

Whom does this topic concern?

- Most colleges and universities have a journalism major or program which houses student publications such as newspapers, radio stations, television stations, magazines, Web sites, newsletters, etc.
- Often the work done on these publications is for class credit.
- Many universities are requiring or strongly suggesting service learning components in every program.
- As universities move in this direction, there is a natural home for service learning in journalism curriculum.
- Service learning activities in journalism courses can benefit the students, faculty, university and community.

Civic journalism in professional media outlets

The Minnesota Public Radio Civic Journalism Initiative

- In 2001 the Minnesota Public Radio newsroom ran a week-long series based on the workings of the University of Minnesota during its 150th anniversary.
- After the stories ran, the newsroom hosted a live 2-hour town meeting in which members of the community were able to address and share ideas with the university administration about the future of the institution.
- The administration also addressed the community members.

Civic journalism in professional media outlets

The Minnesota Public Radio Civic Journalism Initiative

- The same newsgroup developed a series about people affected by the state imposed skills tests required for high school graduation
- Reporters spent months with teachers, students, parents and administrators from a rural area high school to gather information
- After the broadcasts, the newsroom hosted a daylong forum in which those involved told their stories to community members and school board officials

Civic journalism in professional media outlets

The Wisconsin State Journal

- After hearing that many voters in their community felt alienated, the newsroom set out to provide readers with in-depth information about political tactics with the hopes of giving them more understanding of political campaigns
- In this series of articles leading up to election time, reporters researched and reported campaign techniques, public relations strategies and tried to address the broad issue, “What politicians can and cannot do for you.”
- In the final article, the night before the election, information about the “voter’s bill of rights” were published along with tips to cut through negative campaign messages.

Civic journalism in a college news reporting course

The assignment:

Civic journalism seeks to find new and better ways to listen to the public, to focus attention on key public issues and to help citizens think through major decision on public policy. What your group needs to do is decide on a topic (concept, policy, service, etc.)—something you believe the campus and/or community needs to become aware of or know more about.

Civic journalism in a college news reporting course

The final project proposal will include the following:

- A mission statement for your group
- An explanation for why you chose your topic, (or concept, policy, service, etc.)
- A list of possible story ideas with a paragraph on each of the focus and angles you could take
- An additional list of how else the topic could be publicized within our department media
- A narrative detailing the people you talked with who are involved in your topic and how they shaped your project's focus.
- Actual evidence of published work that arose from your efforts. Most likely this will be in the *Northwestern News*. It may come from a story(ies) someone in your group wrote, or stories, columns, surveys, letters-to-the-editor, etc. that you convinced others to contribute to the newspaper . You may also show work that appeared on NWTV 7 or KNSU radio as part of this section.

Examples of student projects

Recycling on campus and in community

- This student group identified that both the NWOSU campus and the Alva community lacked sufficient recycling options
- They began with opinion columns on the topic to spread awareness
- They interviewed and wrote a story about a student organization that recycled printer cartridges as a fund raiser
- They made and published a list of the closest places to recycle for various materials.
- They made themselves available to the community and the student body as contacts for those interested in starting an actual recycling initiative.

Recycling program missing in Alva

By **SCOTT GURSS**
Staff Reporter

Have you looked around town in Alva when it is trash day? There is something missing and I just realized what it was. There are no blue bins that hold cans, paper and plastic. I have been living in Alva for three years now and I have met a lot of people outside of the university.

I know this town is a very close community and if Alva started a recycling program that it would succeed beyond belief. I found out that if you recycle one aluminum can that it can

save enough energy to power a TV for over four hours.

I bet you also didn't know that one ton of recycled paper could save enough energy to power an average sized central heat and air unit for six months. You think that's eye popping? If a ton of plastic gets recycled it saves the equivalent to one to two thousand gallons of gasoline. You do the math.

I've seen this town and university come together and do lots of amazing things for such a small community and if the town of Alva starts working together to recycle this town can do big things.

Agree with us? Disagree with us?



Let us know either way with a letter to the editor.

Mail to Northwestern News 709 Oklahoma Blvd.
Alva, OK 73717
E-mail to
nwnewsroom@hotmail.com

This was the first step in the group's effort to make lack of recycling an issue for the Northwestern News readers.

Sigma Tau Delta recycling cell phones, cartridges



Paper recycling not available on campus; class project seeks additional recycling efforts

paper can save 17 trees, 380 gallons of oil, three cubic yards of landfill space, 4,000 kilowatts of energy, and 7000 gallons of water. This represents a 64 percent energy savings, a 58 percent water savings, and 60 pounds less of air pollution. The 17 trees saved (above) can absorb a total of 250 pounds of carbon dioxide from the air each year. Burning that same ton of paper would create 1500 pounds of carbon dioxide. This makes a great difference on the living environment.

According to the same Web site, Americans throw away 25,000,000 plastic beverage bottles every hour. By recycling these products consumers conserve energy used to dispose of the plastic, but it also cuts down the amount of waste that goes to landfills.

Currently on the

Northwestern campus, the Sigma Tau Delta club, an English Honors Society, has placed recycling boxes around campus to receive old cell phones, electronic equipment, and old printer cartridges.

Not only is the

Alpha Nu Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta Sponsor, said in an e-mail, "Thanks to those who have agreed to host the reciprocals, and helping the Sigma to help the environment."

However there is still a need for a paper and plastics reciprocals on campus.

There is a project proposal, through the News Reporting class, in the works to see if these may be added to the campus. The project group believes that by recycling, not only will it help keep the environment clean from toxic wastes, but it benefit the campus by reusing products that are not yet worn out, such as paper, or plastic materials.

If students or faculty have any ideas that would benefit this proposal they can contact the newsroom at nwnnewsroom@hotmail.com.



recycling effort helping out the environment, but it also raises money to help fund various projects and charities.

Sandra Petree, the

By ERIN FREEDY
Staff Reporter

"Well here I go again throwing away another ink cartridge and a ton of wasted paper."

As a student or employee you may have found yourself in a similar situation, thinking about what a waste it is when

you have printed a document you really didn't need, or when you are finished with a document or an ink cartridge.

Don't worry, you're not alone. An easy solution to these problems is to recycle.

According to the "A Recycling Revolution" Web site, as of 2005, each ton (2,000 pounds) of recycled



ogy. Then Justice finally returned to

tee concerned with the 110-100 celebration for the campus and Oklahoma. Just said he has had

favorite memories was when the BSU was filled with students dressed as M*A*S*H characters

on the back of an encouraging weed. Justice believes that if he starts realizing about the BSU's

Instructor reflects on 30 years with the Baptist Student Union

Examples of student projects

Alva Alive Initiative

- The Alva Chamber of Commerce sponsored a series of meetings called “Alva Alive.”
- The goal was to involve community members in growing the community in various ways
- The student group members interviewed Chamber of Commerce members, promoted the meetings in the campus media, attended the meetings and encouraged letters to the editor and opinion pieces for the *Northwestern News*, the campus paper.

"Alva Alive" should be a collective community effort

By **AMELIA THOMPSON**
Staff Reporter/Designer

Over the years, Alva's population has begun a serious decline. So, the community has come together and created "Alva Alive." Though knowing how few people actually know about it, I would not call it a community effort.

"Alva Alive" is the title of the community's effort to change the direction the population has taken. This effort includes changing Alva's physical appeal (making the town cleaner and prettier to look at), in order to draw attention to the town and bring in prospective businesses. I have been told that this project will focus on the infrastructure of the town and recreational aspects.

But I am concerned that

the younger generations are not being included. So who cares if what they want for Alva is unrealistic? At least the community would know where they stand. And their wants could be taken in to consideration when big decisions are made. Because anything that gets done to the town of Alva affects everybody who lives here, even if it affects them indirectly, it still reaches them.

By asking the younger generation what they want, the community could figure out new ways to keep them out of trouble. By going directly to them, the community would have ideas of activities to do, or places to hang out that they would be interested in so they would not be tempted to do worse things. That old cliché "out of the horse's mouth" fits here.

Pay attention. The community has a very real opportunity to involve all of Alva's population, and hopefully discover possible ways and ideas to prevent problems down the road.

In my home town community, another project of

the same ilk is taking place. I was lucky enough to be involved on several occasions. My hometown does have problems with adolescents and illegal substances, alcohol, and general stupidity. But they surveyed and talked to many people of younger ages to find out things that interest them in order to hopefully prevent them from getting into trouble. Sadly, my home town is too poor to afford many changes, but that is beside the point. My point is-ask everyone their opinion, and just listen.

So there is a very real need for everyone to get involved with this. Besides getting your share in during discussion, actually do some of the physical labor to help clean up Alva. People will tell you that volunteer work looks good on applications and resumes.

There are meetings being held where community members get together to discuss changes that need to be made, or ones they want to make. I have not been able to go to any of these meetings, but there are still more coming up. So go and get involved. Help represent all ages of Alva's population.

This opinion piece came from one of the group members after she interviewed the Chamber of Commerce director about the Alva Alive meetings.

are a different way

to have your voice heard in the North

Expanding student projects

In the future students could:

- Host forums about their topics, open to campus and community
- Work in conjunction with the town paper to publish their work in an effort to reach more community members
- Invite guest speakers to campus who can provide information on their chosen topic
- Team up with more community and non profit organizations to maximize efforts

Reflection

The students reflect on their civic learning project, partially in discussion and partially through a survey. The survey asks them to describe their civic journalism experience and answer questions such as:

- Did this activity help you understand more about civic journalism? Please explain.
- Do you believe this activity benefited the campus and/or community? Please explain.
- Even though there is a level of subjectivity in a civic journalism project, were you able to remain objective in your endeavors? Please explain.
- Do you believe this project enhances the News Reporting curriculum? Why or why not?
- Civic journalism thrives on the idea that instead of remaining purely objective in the search for truth, journalists have a *civic responsibility* to make known certain topics to their communities. Did this activity increase your sense of civic responsibility? Please explain.

Student responses in reflection

- “I had an idea of how I’d make my town revive, but listening to my peers showed me I was only scratching the surface.”
- “It makes students take on bigger stories other than the everyday news.”
- “At first I was not sure what I was looking for or how to put it out. As we worked through the assignment I gained a much better understanding.”
- “It requires the student to be more creative and introduces them to the real world.”

Student responses in reflection

- “The point is to inform people. Even if we only did the start of the project, we still reached people about real issues.”
- “It gave me a tie to the community, so I want to help make sure that it thrives.”
- “I totally agree with my subject, so it was hard to be objective.”
- “It made me more aware of topics important to the general population of our city, state and world.”

Benefits

- Students:
 - Develop projects they care about
 - Very real-world journalism experience
 - Sense of community involvement
 - Make connections in their community
- Faculty
 - Fulfilling, meaningful assignment
 - Tangible results
 - Promoting university missions

Benefits

- University
 - Projects can take place within and benefit the university
 - Fulfills service learning requirements
 - Connects university and community
 - Promotes well-rounded students
- Community
 - Community made aware of important issues
 - Community members connected to students
 - Community members given a voice on important issues

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