**Vice Presidents’ Task Force on Service Learning and Student Engagement**

**September, 2010**

In *Priorities for Excellence, The Penn State Strategic Plan, 2009-10 through 2013-14*, Goal 1, Strategy 1.2 challenges the University to enhance student success by expanding and promoting opportunities for students to engage in research and active learning. More specifically, the Strategic Plan presents the challenge:

“A considerable body of research indicates that students who are more engaged in public scholarship and service learning are more successful in their college experiences and upon graduation are more likely to be engaged citizens in their communities. Opportunities to participate in public scholarship, service learning, and co-curricular experiences encourage the development of leadership and decision-making skills. These learning opportunities help to reinforce connections across the curriculum and co-curriculum and encourage application of learning to communities that may not be otherwise encountered in the educational experience. Penn State’s own surveys indicate that students are very interested and wish to participate in such activities. The University must provide more opportunities to engage graduate and undergraduate students.”

According to the Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence, “Service learning is a pedagogical model that actively places learning within the conditions of contemporary social circumstances. Often resulting in a powerful learning experience for both faculty and students, service learning extends the classroom into the community by connecting a service project with academic course work. This form of learning requires students to apply their academic knowledge and skills as well as to intentionally consider (reflect upon) their service experience.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

In her book, *Building Partnerships for Service-Learning*, Barbara Jacoby notes that, “We are more certain of the powerful ways in which service-learning contributes to what has become an even clearer and sharper focus on the quality and coherence of the student learning experience and the achievement of desired learning outcomes.”[[2]](#footnote-2) To achieve these outcomes at Penn State, there are currently a number of academic and administrative entities actively engaged in facilitating some aspect of service-learning, including the Laboratory for Public Scholarship and Democracy, the Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence, the Schreyer Honors College, and the Community Service & Service Learning Office in Student Affairs. In addition, many faculty across Penn State have successfully integrated service-learning and active research into their teaching methodology. However, the process by which such faculty-student connections are made often tends to be ad hoc, and there is limited coordination of service-learning activities at the institutional level that would allow faculty and students to fully understand the wealth of service learning teaching, research and co-curricular opportunities, resources, and support services available at Penn State.

In addition, the Council on Engagement, in applying for the Carnegie Elective Classification in Community Engagement, interviewed a number of peer institutions concerning student engagement. Several institutions reported that they have found that a coordinated approach to student engagement was beneficial to their recruiting efforts. Many high School students are now required to participate in community-based curricular and co-curricular activities, and a large cohort seek to continue that engagement at the postsecondary level.

Therefore, the vice presidents of Undergraduate Education, Student Affairs, and Outreach will sponsor a University-wide task force to explore the opportunities for a coordinated University approach to service learning and curricular and co-curricular undergraduate student engagement that meets the charge outlined in Strategy 1.2 of the Penn State Strategic Plan.

**Charge**

The Vice Presidents’ Task Force on Student Engagement will determine how to coordinate and extend the full spectrum of curricular and co-curricular student engagement experiences available at Penn State for undergraduate students.

The Task Force is charged to:

* Define what service learning and student engagement mean for Penn State. The definition will encompass active learning, community-based research, applied research, experiential learning, and other similar teaching and learning pedagogies.
* Benchmark other higher education institutions nationwide with a focus on our peer institutions and on those with a national reputation in student engagement;
* Identify what is currently being done well at Penn State, and how to make those efforts scalable; and,
* Recommend an alternative University strategy for providing student-centered coordination of service-learning opportunities across Penn State.

**Deliverable**

The Task Force will provide the sponsoring vice presidents with specific recommendations that address the above charge. **An interim report will be provided to the sponsoring vice presidents by XXX and a final report by XXX.**

1. See http://www.schreyerinstitute.psu.edu/Tools/ServiceLearning/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Jacoby, Barbara and Associates. *Building Partnerships for Service-Learning*, Jossey-Bass, 2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)