Community Engagement Roundtable Series

Meeting Summary
April 5, 2017

Topic:
Service-Learning 101: Best Practices in Community-Engaged Teaching

Speaker:
Dave Lassen (Global & Community Engagement Coordinator)

Summary:
This roundtable was a general introduction to the theory and practice of service-learning. It began with an overview of the definition of and motivations behind community engagement. University-community partnerships are most effective when they are based on the goals, assets, and perspective of each partner. Service-learning classes are a specific application of the general community engagement framework. Though there is no universal definition of service-learning, service-learning classes are most often described as traditional, credit-bearing classes that also include
- off-campus experiences where
- students apply course content and skills
- for the real, direct benefit of a community partner.
- Students then complete one or more structured reflection activities.

The conversation also discussed the benefits instructors and students frequently receive from a service-learning course. Based on existing studies, benefits include significant gains in student:
- Attitudes about their own academic abilities
- Attitudes about their college/university
- Civic engagement
- Career preparation and skills development
- Social skills

Benefits for faculty include:
- Access to unique data
- Opportunity to conduct applied research
- Enhanced student learning/growth
- Opportunity to integrate personal and professional identities

Other key points from the conversation include:
- When developing community partnerships, spend time with the organization on their terms. Participate in their events and demonstrate knowledge and support of their goals.
- Before making their first off-campus visit, students in service-learning classes should receive information on the history, social identities, and organizational culture of their community partner.
There are many types of structured reflection activities that students may benefit from, including journals, reflective essays, group discussions, and creative/expressive exercises. Reflection activities are most effective when they are structured; integrated into course content; related to students’ recent, off-campus experiences; and are more than a simple report of their actions.