Aspirations for Student Learning Symposium: Embrace Ut Prosim as a Way of Life

Virginia Tech

Ductus Exemplo (Leadership by Example): Faculty Must Model Service First

Rishi Sriram, Ph.D.

Baylor University

ABSTRACT:

The calls for incorporating civic engagement and service into higher education go far and wide. Although the focused attention upon civic engagement is generally regarded as a positive movement within higher education, underlying this movement is a trend that is ironic at best and hypocritical at worst: a trend for faculty at research institutions to place less emphasis on serving in their own work. The de-emphasis on service in the professoriate is especially concerning in light of the research on the positive benefits of student-faculty interaction outside of the classroom. Living-learning programs and faculty-in-residence programs structurally provide faculty the opportunity to engage with students both academically and socially, contributing to learning outcomes such as student persistence and holistic development. Moreover, such programs institutionalize a way for faculty to reclaim service in the professoriate. The overarching purpose of this paper is to redirect the Ut Prosim lens upon faculty in order that they may model the way for students.
Ductus Exemplo (Leadership by Example): Faculty Must Model Service First

The calls for incorporating civic engagement and service into higher education go far and wide. The U.S. Department of Education “envisions a nationwide commitment to preparing all students for citizenship as informed, engaged, and responsible members of our society” (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The Obama administration recently released a road map for civic learning and engagement that outlines nine steps for increasing informed service in the U.S. For the past several decades, the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) has supported civic education, civic learning, community service, and service-learning in more than 30 projects that fund curriculum and program development to foster civic engagement in college students. Prestigious universities throughout the nation incorporate service into their mission statements and strategic plans, and civic education is at the forefront of discussions on how to provide the best postsecondary education. Although the focused attention upon civic engagement is generally regarded as a positive movement within higher education, underlying this movement is a trend that is ironic at best and hypocritical at worst: a trend for faculty at research institutions to place less emphasis on serving in their own work. The purpose of this paper is to redirect Virginia Tech’s Ut Prosim (“that I may serve”) lens upon faculty in order that they may model the way of service for students. Learning outcomes for this paper include:

1) Drawing attention to the de-emphasis of service in the professoriate;
2) Highlighting empirical evidence that service in the professoriate benefits college students; and
3) Offering faculty-in-residence programs as a meaningful pathway for institutions to systematically and symbolically connect students and faculty outside of the classroom.

The Historical Role of Service in the Professoriate
During the 19th century, only a select group of higher education institutions thrived in the U.S. This landscape changed, however, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, thanks to what Thelin (2011) refers to as “captains of industry and erudition” (p. 110). From 1880 to 1910, colleges became universities, and these institutions embodied a similar academic culture. Faculty became increasingly professionalized, becoming known experts in their fields. Disciplinary associations and publications were formed, leading to more national conferences, national journals, and faculty who were more cosmopolitans than locals (Birnbaum, 1988).

As Thelin (2011) notes, “a new conception of academic professionalism was essential to the creation of a university professoriate” (p. 128). This professionalism included the gradations of rank (lecturer, assistant professor, associate professor, and full professor) and how institutions handled promotion and tenure. The professionalization of faculty influenced pedagogy, the development of professional schools, curriculum, student culture, facilities, and the overall dynamics of the academic enterprise (Thelin, 2011). But the accompanying growth and specialization also created a need for more bureaucracy and an infrastructure leading to more departments and academic administrators to lead those departments. Faculty, consequently, were treated as labor—a means to grow the university and turn inputs into outputs (Thelin).

Increased specialization of faculty, further decentralization of administration, and more complicated administrative infrastructure all further emphasized the utilitarian needs of research and teaching while undermining the importance of faculty service.

There are three general areas of work for the professoriate: research, teaching, and service. The race for institutions to improve rankings (McDonough, Antonio, Walpole, & Perez, 1998) has increased the pressure for faculty to produce research (Meredith, 2004). This, in turn, causes faculty—particularly those on the tenure-track—to spend more time on research and less
time on service (Hacker & Dreifus, 2010). Therefore, while service in the form of engaging students outside of the classroom or participating in other activities that benefit the local campus remains an espoused value for faculty in higher education, the basic underlying assumption (Schein, 2004) is that service does not matter for tenure or promotion for college faculty (Hacker & Dreifus, 2010).

Boyer (1990) sought to help academic leaders and faculty rethink scholarship in his classic book, *Scholarship Reconsidered*. He called for the restoration of teaching and service to their once-prominent position within the professoriate. Boyer created a four-part framework for conceptualizing scholarship, including discovery, integration, application, and teaching. Interestingly, Boyer’s (1990) work is both highly touted and largely ignored (Schrecker, 2010). Instead of rebalancing the faculty role toward service, higher education institutions focused more heavily on research. Even liberal arts colleges succumbed to the competition for resources and the desire to raise perceived prestige through grants and publications. Teaching in the academy was undermined while service in the academy was not even discussed.

According to Schrecker (2010), faculty “were coming to identify themselves and their professional careers with their disciplines, not with the colleges and universities where they taught” (p. 189). Empirical evidence demonstrated the same idea. In the mid-1990s, 77 percent of professors in one study said that their discipline was important to them, but only 40 percent said their campus was important (Schrecker, 2010). Meanwhile, colleges and universities increasingly rely upon part-time and adjunct faculty to teach courses (Hacker & Dreifus, 2010; Schrecker, 2010). In 1975, almost 60 percent of college professors were tenured or on the tenure-track. That number is now down to 35 percent (DelBanco, 2012). Adjunct faculty may be wonderful educators, but such faculty rarely have sufficient office space on campus, often teach
at several institutions in order to support themselves financially, and are called upon to serve even less than tenured and tenure-track faculty. The resulting two-tiered system of academic appointment distributes teaching evenly, but distributes most other work activities (administrative responsibilities, research, and service) onto a shrinking number of core, permanent faculty (Finkelstein, 2001).

Therefore, multiple trends in higher education from multiple vantage points all led to the same result: the marginalization of the concept of faculty serving their local campuses and, more specifically, their students outside of the classes they teach. As DelBanco admits, “college as a community of learning is, for many students, already an anachronism” (p. 151).

**Why Student-Faculty Interactions Matter**

The de-emphasis on service in the professoriate is especially concerning in light of the research on the positive benefits of student-faculty interaction outside of the classroom. Much research highlights student residential communities as environments rich in potential for the development of student-faculty relationships and related learning outcomes (Garrett & Zabriskie, 2003; Golde & Pribbenow, 2012; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Mara & Mara, 2010; Shushok, Henry, Blalock, & Sriram, 2009). Living-learning programs and faculty-in-residence programs structurally provide faculty the opportunity to engage with students both academically and socially, contributing to holistic learning outcomes and overall student persistence (Cotten & Wilson, 2006; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Garrett & Zabriskie, 2003).

Though current research suggests that students may not be explicitly aware of the positive outcomes that result from student-faculty interactions, students have much to gain from both formal and informal interactions with faculty (Cotten & Wilson, 2006; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Informal student-faculty interactions that are high in both quality and
frequency are shown to have the greatest impact on student learning outcomes (Cox & Orehovec, 2007; Kuh & Hu, 2001). Ultimately, however, as Kuh & Hu (2001) note, “…for most students most of the time, the more interactions with faculty the better” (p. 329).

In his classic, *Beyond the Ivory Tower*, Derek Bok (1982) discusses the critical role institutions of higher education play in helping students become more thoughtful and perceptive about critical societal problems. He notes that a declining influence of families, churches, and grade schools coincides with a potentially increasing influence of colleges and universities on the moral development of students. In the 19th century, colleges devoted themselves to the mission of developing students morally, giving meaning and purpose to students in addition to career advancement (Bok, 1982). Such devotion is no longer the case in higher education, and this loss is not just a loss for students, it is a loss for society:

Not only the quality of individual young adult lives but also our future as a culture depends in no small measure upon our capacity to recognize the emerging competence of young adults, to initiate them into big questions, and to give them access to worthy dreams. (Parks, 2000, p. xi.)

Parks highlights the critical role of mentorship in the life stage referred to as emerging adulthood (Smith & Snell, 2009). Acknowledging that the term *mentor* is overused, Parks advocates that the term “is best reserved for a distinctive role in the story of human becoming” (p. 128). Mentorship involves recognizing the value of a particular student, supporting the development of the student’s potential, challenging the student to improve, inspiring the student that improvement is worth the hard work, and dialoging with the student in such a way that, over time, the two become colleagues (Parks, 2000).
Parks cites higher education as one of seven key environments where good mentorship can and should occur. Colleges are mentoring environments with multiple, smaller mentoring communities. Examples of these mentoring communities include academic majors and departments, individual classes themselves, athletic teams, student organizations, and residential communities. Defining faith and spirituality as meaning-making and encountering life’s big questions, Parks states that “every institution of higher education serves in at least some measure as a community of imagination in which every professor is potentially a spiritual guide and every syllabus a confession of faith” (p. 159). The faculty member is not the only mentoring role on a college campus, but the student-faculty relationship is central to the educational experience of college students. Parks anticipates the uneasiness that comes with referring to professors as spiritual guides, but she also worries that the separation of church and state in public institutions has led to the unintentional separation of self from truth. Professors give more than their knowledge, they give their very selves. This giving of self can be acknowledged and embraced, or it can be denied and rejected. The critical problem with denial is that emerging adults desire mentorship, even if they do a poor job conveying it.

Smith and Snell (2009) have conducted what they believe to be the most comprehensive and reliable study of the lives of emerging adults in the United States today. The first phase of Smith’s study was conducted from 2001 to 2005. During this time he surveyed more than 3,000 of America’s teenagers (ages 13-17) and conducted follow-up interviews with over 250 of the participants. Smith conducted another study on the same group five years later, when they reached the ages of traditional college students (ages 18-23). This research reaffirms the notion of emerging adulthood as a new life phase. According to psychologist Jeffery Arnett (2004), emerging adulthood is more than an in-between phase bookended by high school and the “real
world.” Rather, it is an independent stage of life characterized by “intense identity exploration, instability, a focus on self…and unparalleled hope” (Smith & Snell, 2009, p. 6). Smith and Snell (2009) describe how four macro changes in American society led to the creation of emerging adulthood: (a) the rapid growth of enrollment in higher education, (b) the delay of marriage for young adults, (c) low job security and subsequent frequent job changes, and (d) the extension of parental financial support to children at older ages. These four social changes provide emerging adults with unprecedented freedom from traditional social expectations. Indeed, Smith and Snell note that emerging adults “are determined to be free. But they do not know what is worth doing with their freedom” (p. 294).

In short, research demonstrates that the way emerging adults make meaning affects decisions for many important aspects of life. As adolescents, individual family households and religious congregations have the greatest impact on spiritual development (Smith & Denton, 2005). But as adolescents become emerging adults, higher education institutions have the potential to shape this development in powerful ways. Smith and Snell’s (2009) research emphasizes the powerful role non-parental adults play in the lives of emerging adults. Although many emerging adults may or may not take initiative in their own meaning-making, they are surprisingly open to initiative, interest, and investment by others. Emerging adults know that there is more to life than what many of them have discovered and they desire help in understanding the “more.” Through direct mentorship and the creation of opportunities to explore meaning and purpose, faculty can help emerging adults develop in ways that fit the context and mission of any campus. Delbanco (2012) expresses a similar notion from his own experience:
But having observed and participated in classes at a wide range of colleges with students at all levels of preparation and sophistication, it’s been my experience that whether they are studying accounting or philosophy, hotel management or history, the vast majority of college students are capable of engaging the kinds of big questions—questions of truth, responsibility, justice, beauty, among others—that were once assumed to be at the center of college education. (p. 172-173)

Preserving, or reclaiming, the transformative education possible in college must come from a concerted effort of higher education institutions to encourage faculty to reclaim service in their roles. No institution can easily or quickly undo a century of change in higher education, but faculty-in-residence programs can serve as a small win for needed change.

**Faculty-in-Residence Programs as a Small Win**

Weick (1984) famously advocated for progress in society’s biggest problems through the employment of small wins. Weick purports that, rather than focus on solutions to big problems, leaders need to pay close attention to how those problems are framed in the first place. In other words, the problem with big problems is that they are considered big:

The massive scale on which social problems are conceived often precludes innovative action because the limits of bounded rationality are exceeded and arousal is raised to dysfunctionally high levels. People often define social problems in ways that overwhelm their ability to do anything about them. (p. 40)

Therefore, Weick advocates for small wins—the recasting of larger problems into smaller, less anxiety-inducing problems so that people can identify opportunities within their control (and of modest size) that create visible results and that increase momentum of progress.
The problem with modern criticisms of higher education is that such critiques are bold, broad, big, and correct (at least in part). Rather than inspiring people toward change, Weick (1984) might argue that these critiques are causing more harm than good by paralyzing people with fear and anxiety to the point that hopelessness sets in. Delbanco (2012), who authors one of these critiques of higher education, at least indirectly admits to this problem: “So the problems are big, but despite recent demands that academia reform itself down to its foundations, big solutions—whether initiated from within or from without—are unlikely” (p. 162).

A small win is a complete, concrete, practical, implemented outcome of moderate importance and scale (Weick, 1984). Small wins have specific parameters. A small win is seemingly unimportant, and that is where its genius lies. By finding the right balance between significance and relative unimportance, small wins are less likely to attract opponents and more likely to attract allies who have more to gain from the success of the small win than they have to lose if the small win is unsuccessful. Although in hindsight a coherent narrative of success can be developed, in practice small wins are not emblematic of a linear process that was simply divided up into small, logical steps. Small wins are artful, opportunistic, and somewhat unpredictable in their eventual impact toward progress.

If service has been de-emphasized over the last century in higher education, small wins may be the best route to recovery. Colleges are self-regulating institutions, and their slowness to change is a strength rather than a hindrance. If one part of an institution seeks dramatic, immediate change, another part of the system is likely to counteract and reduce the change through a stabilizing loop (Birnbaum, 1988). On the other hand, small wins can initiate amplifying loops, where a small change in one part of a system leads to eventual large change in the system as a whole. To have a small win with service in the higher education professoriate,
faculty must take a step toward actively caring for their students outside of classrooms. Faculty-in-residence programs can be a structural and symbolic small win for campuses to demonstrate a change in direction regarding faculty service, without having to upend the entire faculty role. As Delbanco notes:

If good things are to happen to students, faculty must care, not only because this is the basic precondition of good teaching, but because, with a few minor exceptions such as teaching awards or, occasionally, supplementary pay for teaching certain required courses, the proffered rewards of academic life—promotion, raises, leaves—have nothing to do with demonstrated concern for students. (p. 166).

Faculty-in-residence programs have the potential to directly impact students in positive ways while also sending a broader message about the importance of student-faculty interaction and mentorship. While these programs provide faculty a venue for repeated formal and informal interaction with students, these interactions alone are likely not enough to significantly impact student learning outcomes. In order for faculty-in-residence programs to make a significant impact on learning outcomes, students must not only experience high-quality, frequent interactions with faculty members, but these interactions must also change the way that students perceive the faculty role. For example, a study from Umbach & Wawrzynski (2005) suggests that students are unlikely to seek support or guidance from faculty in their traditional role as instructor. However, Garrett & Zabriskie (2003) instead emphasize the role of faculty as mentor. Faculty become mentors to students when they intentionally and actively engage in students’ academic and social environments (Garrett & Zabriskie, 2003). Subsequently, faculty have greater opportunity to significantly influence the student experience when students view faculty as mentors rather than instructors.
As faculty seek to meet students where they are, both in their “social” and “academic” environments, these environments become less compartmentalized, allowing for social integration to occur in the classroom and academic integration to occur in residential communities. Incidental contact is likely to occur in high frequency, thus opening the door to functional interactions which can ultimately lead to the development of personal, mentor-mentee relationships (Cox & Orehovec, 2007; Mara & Mara, 2010). When faculty repeatedly initiate contact within the student environment (i.e., residence hall, dining hall, etc.), students report that student-faculty barriers decrease as students become able to imagine the faculty member as a more relatable person outside of the formal structure of the classroom (Mara & Mara, 2010). This allows the faculty member to more readily adopt the role of mentor instead of instructor (Garrett & Zabriskie, 2003). Parks (2000) found that students’ most valued learning occurs with a teacher and a small group of students. She writes, “This is good news for faculty and other potential mentors, in an age when mentoring has reappeared as an important—and scarce—relationship” (p. 127). Faculty-in-residence programs create a type of mentoring environment that communicates availability and intentionality even to those students who may not take advantage of the faculty member’s availability. However, students are not the only ones to gain from such interactions. Faculty themselves report meaningful reflections upon their role as professors and numerous benefits from serving as faculty-in-residence (Sriram, Shushok, Perkins, & Scales, 2011). They therefore become the strongest advocates for more opportunities on campus to bring students and faculty together in meaningful, natural ways. In consideration of this literature, faculty-in-residence programs are a means to significantly and positively impact the student experience, while also reconceptualizing the faculty role on campus.

**Implications for Practice**
A number of concerns might be raised from both campus leaders and faculty regarding how to transform a campus with faculty-in-residence programs. The following implications for practice can help campuses focus on creating small wins that eventually build toward sustainable change.

**Do not try to change faculty. Instead, give your mentoring faculty an outlet.** Campus leaders may ask, “How are we to reshape the culture of our campus and the culture of academia as a whole in order to create a faculty-in-residence program?” This is a big problem, and framing it as such is the biggest problem (Weick, 1984). Every campus can divide its faculty into three groups: those who will never seek to serve students outside of the classroom, those who are already mentoring students outside of the classroom, and a very large group in the middle of these two extremes. A small win would entail not trying to change anyone, but rather giving those faculty who are already most devoted to service an outlet to do so better. In other words, a campus needs only begin with one outstanding faculty mentor in a faculty-in-residence program, and any campus will have several candidates to meet that criterion.

**Roles, structure, and expectations matter for success.** The roles, structure, and expectations of faculty-in-residence programs matter for success. It is important for senior leaders in academic affairs and student affairs to partner together to develop the job description of a faculty-in-residence. The job description should clearly outline what the faculty member will do in comparison to what the residence hall director will do. The hall director needs to see the faculty member as an asset and not a threat. The job description should also be inspiring, drawing mentoring faculty to this unique opportunity. It should clearly communicate a philosophy of learning in residential communities (Shushok, Scales, Sriram, & Kidd, 2011). Benefits should be clearly laid out and should be as generous as possible. In addition, if leaders
are not willing to invest in constructing a faculty residence in the community that is both attractive to faculty who will potentially live there and students who will potentially commune there, the program is already in trouble. Living rooms need to be large enough to accommodate a large group of students, and amenities need to be comparable to what a faculty member would have in her or his home. When the community is marketed to potential students, the faculty-in-residence program should always be front and center, creating an expectation for students that they will have opportunities to interact with a faculty member in a unique manner.

**Do not let the numbers outweigh the symbolic meaning.** Student-faculty interaction and faculty-in-residence programs have a structured, empirical, positive influence on students. However, these numbers should not become more important than the symbolic messages sent by the institution through the investment in a faculty-in-residence program. Although any one faculty-in-residence may directly impact only a few hundred students (likely a very small percentage of the student population), the message is sent to all students that this institution cares about student-faculty interaction and mentorship and is doing something about it. Research shows that the majority of students in a community with a faculty-in-residence will not directly interact with the faculty member (Cox & Orehovec, 2007), but those students are still impacted by knowing that the faculty member is available for such interaction. Prospective parents and students understand that, in a small way, the institution is taking steps to combat the criticism higher education faces regarding a growing divide between students and faculty. One successful faculty-in-residence program lays a foundation for a second successful program, which increases the direct influence of the program on an increasing number of students. These programs can be implemented one-by-one, thoughtfully placing them in residential communities that show the greatest potential for continued success.
First who, then what. As mentioned above, roles, structure, and expectations matter greatly for the success of a faculty-in-residence program. However, nothing is more important than selecting the right person to fill the role, especially for the first program on a campus. In the business world, Collins (2001) discovered that thriving companies found the right people before they decided in what direction to go as a company. Even on a single campus, residential communities will differ in size, physical makeup, members, and culture. What works for a faculty-in-residence in one community may not work for another. Therefore, it is vital that campuses select the best person possible for this position. How? The potential faculty-in-residence must already demonstrate mentorship and service before taking the role. Past performance is the best predictor of future performance. In addition to campus wide emails announcing the position and inviting applicants, senior leaders in academic affairs and student affairs should proactively recruit those faculty with the passion and history indicative of potential success. If those faculty who are already serving students outside of the classroom are not the ones applying for the faculty-in-residence role, senior leaders should actively seek to discover why and reflect on how the position can be restructured and recast so that it is more attractive to applicants.

Conclusion

When it comes to students understanding service, the calls and practices go far and wide in higher education. Meanwhile, service in the professoriate is fading away. Service matters because it shapes students in positive ways, and college campuses are in desperate need of a reforming of the professoriate role in order to bring back student-faculty interaction. Changing the culture of the professoriate is difficult, if not impossible. However, creating small wins through the formation of faculty-in-residence programs allows for faculty to emphasize service
through leadership by example. These programs can directly impact a small segment of students while sending a larger symbolic message to constituents that faculty service matters once again.
References


theories of residential life that shape the student experience. *About Campus, 16*(3), 13-21.


