INTEGRATING SERVICE-LEARNING AND CONSULTING IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

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BY

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To my family. And to those who continue to make my professional journey worthwhile: my graduate students and our consulting clients.

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CONTENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr Marie-Line Germain is a research, teaching, and service award-winning Associate Professor of Human Resources and Leadership at Western Carolina University (The University of North Carolina System). Her PhD is in Leadership with a specialization in Human Resource Development. She is the Author of two books, *Narcissism at Work: Personality Disorders of Corporate Leaders*, and *Integrating Service-Learning and Consulting in Distance Education*. She has published over three dozen research articles in journals and presented over 50 research papers internationally (Australia, Brazil, Canada, Croatia, France, India, Peru, The Netherlands, Scotland, and Spain). Germain has received several national awards and competitive grants, including a Fulbright from the US Department of State. She holds several leadership roles at Research and Professional Associations nationally and internationally, and has been a Visiting Scholar-professor in China, Finland, Ghana, Japan, and South Korea. In 2011, she founded the HR Consulting Initiative, which provides pro bono HR consulting nationwide, entirely online. She is also a consultant for Fortune 500 and CAC 40 companies. She has lived and worked in France, England, and Scotland.

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PREFACE

The field of higher education, student demographics, and employers' demands for a highly skilled workforce are constantly evolving.

The workplace evolution stems from organizations with demanding business imperatives and an increasing need for a skilled workforce within them. Meanwhile, the student demographic is undergoing vast changes; students are often older than the traditional 18 years of age, and many of these older students are parents working full- or part-time jobs in addition to schooling, and thus need to balance work and school life more than ever before.

These non-traditional students seek more relevance to their work outside of schooling and want to feel that their education is making a difference in their own lives and the lives of those around them. In essence, today's students seek relevance and want their education to be an *experience*. Also, there has been a change in course delivery format, with a distinct focus on the business imperative and the demand for certain qualities and qualifications in the workplace. This change in focus carries with it the expectation from students that universities will help meet these demands while delivering a quality education and offering opportunities to engage in their community.

Additionally, online learning has grown significantly in the last decade and e-service-learning addresses the growing

demand for flexibly delivered online courses and programs. The average annual growth rate of online enrollments in the past decade was nearly 20% in higher learning institutions. Traditional schools overwhelmingly agree that online education is critical to their future-class offerings. Meanwhile, technology is increasingly ubiquitous throughout personal and work life as the main source to deliver and share information. Online instruction has redefined higher education teaching and traditional community service has only begun adapting to this change. The geographical boundaries set by traditional community service prevent most colleges and universities from offering online students the opportunity to be engaged in community service. Online service-learning responds to this limitation by making the transfer of on-campus community service to the online environment possible.

Written by a professor and researcher with eight years of successful service-learning and consulting integration in online environments, this book presents a model and instructions for faculty to successfully integrate a remote service-learning and consulting component in an online course. The book explores best practices, limitations, and the benefits of e-service-learning/consulting for students, faculty, universities, client-organizations, and the community-at-large.

E-service-learning responds to the needs of multiple groups, including students, faculty, and the universities they represent. Students seek a sense of purpose in their coursework and value the social responsibility of community service. E-service-learning provides the opportunity for students to build their résumés with real-work experience while strengthening their confidence and enhancing their communication and virtual teamwork skills. Faculty who want to go beyond theory while building their service requirements may use e-service-learning to apply the theoretical knowledge students acquire in courses, and offer relevant and real-world

applications and hands-on experience. In addition, universities are able to fulfill their strategic goals, serve the community-at-large, and grow their online programs by offering students a unique online course experience.

Online service-learning and consulting transforms traditional community service, student engagement, and the online learning landscape.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is the result of eight years overseeing consulting projects with close to 700 master's degree students for over 170 organizations in 17 US states. It is a resource for those who are passionate about service-learning, consulting, and distance education, as well as those who are interested in making a positive impact on students, universities, and communities. I am grateful to my graduate students and to my colleagues for their constructive feedback while developing this e-consulting initiative.

> *If you want to be a true professional, you will do something outside yourself. Something to repair tears in your community. Something to make life a little better for people less fortunate than you. That's what I think a meaningful life is — living not for oneself, but for one's community.*
>
> — Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

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INTRODUCTION

Today's average student is no longer the 18-year-old whose parents drive her up to "State U" in a minivan stuffed with boxes. Instead, the "new normal" student may be a 24-year-old returning veteran, a 36-year-old single mother, a part-time student juggling work and college, or the first-generation college student. The faces we picture as our college hopefuls can't be limited by race, age, income, zip code, disability, or any other factor.
— Ted Mitchell, Under Secretary (US Department of Education, 2017, p. 6).

We live in times of sustained uncertainty. Our lives are increasingly connected but virtual. We are dependent on technology and our handheld devices to communicate, and personal and work relationships are more remote than ever before. More people work from home. Employees work in virtual teams, and webinars are replacing seminars. Yet, teams and relationships remain critical to business advance.

Meanwhile, the field of higher education, student demographics, and employers' demands for a highly skilled workforce are constantly evolving. Higher education has been

instrumental for economic growth and social mobility. For it to continue to serve as an equalizer, we need constant innovation to further enhance student access and increase affordability. The goal of such innovation includes improving the educational experience of learners and ensuring that the content delivered is aligned with the differing needs of students and the skills needed by employers.

Employers have traditionally defined students by the type of institution of higher learning they attended. For instance, we often refer to "graduate school students," "community college students," or "Ivy League students." By using such categorization, we have ignored the idiosyncrasies and needs of our students – those who may have full-time employment and must juggle work, school, and family life, those who fully depend on financial aid assistance, or those whose physical limitations require accommodation. The "new normal" undergraduate students in higher education work either full-time or part-time (62 percent), 28 percent of them have at least one dependent, and 63 percent are first-generation students (NCES, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

College enrollment in both on-campus and online courses has significantly increased in the last few decades. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), fall enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions increased 23 percent between 1995 and 2005. Between 2005 and 2015 alone, enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions increased 14 percent, from 17.5 million to 20 million. This increase is the result of a combination of factors, including deindustrialization, globalization, the outsourcing of jobs, the increased use of technology, the demand for a skilled workforce, and the economic recession of 2008 (NCES, 2016). The bulk of this growth is in online education, which has consistently surpassed on-campus enrollment for the past decade. In 2013, students who took exclusively

online courses represented 12.5 percent of the overall US student population, and this trend continues.

The US employment landscape has undergone significant changes over the past 20 years. American workers are adapting to the new realities of the workplace and rethinking the skills they need to remain competitive. A 2016 Pew Research Center survey (Pew Research Center, 2016) and analysis of government data finds that employment in occupations requiring more education and training is on the rise, and many workers are realizing that retraining and upskilling needs to be a lifetime commitment. Specifically, the report highlights that employment has been rising faster in occupations requiring more preparation; employment and wages have increased most in occupations that require higher social or analytical skills. The majority of American workers say they will need continuous training to keep up with changes in the workplace. And most Americans think the responsibility for making sure the workforce has the right skills and education to be successful in today's economy lies with individuals themselves (Brown, 2016).

These changes have impacted the attributes of higher education students. Today's learners need flexible course schedules and a flexible location to take courses. They also value quality learning experiences. To meet these needs, new programs and education providers have emerged in partnership with or within existing institutions. Some new models of learning opportunities range from job-based training programs to competency-based education and online learning (Ho et al., 2015). The use of new technology contributes to the successful design of an approach to education that is increasingly student-centered, lower in cost, and flexible in hours and location.

In a learner-centered higher education system, learning should be both lifelong and lifewide. That is, learning should

occur in schools but also at work, in the community, at home, and anywhere where mobile technology is available. It is through these "all-the-time and everywhere" learning experiences that learners can be rewarded for demonstrating their newly acquired knowledge through credit-earning and industry-recognized credentialing (U.S. Department, 2017). A learner-centered approach must also guide students toward education that is suitable to their needs, aligns with their interests, and enables them to achieve their goals. Additionally, this approach should provide students with affordable access to the high-quality resources they need to empower themselves to become curators of their own learning. In turn, educational institutions should ensure that students have immediate access to affordable, up-to-date learning materials that are based on current learning research and are accessible to all students. Institutions should encourage practices that support student agency to find, evaluate, and utilize additional learning resources that will prove relevant beyond a single course. Finally, in a learner-centered approach, students should be able to document their learning in ways that can be applied to further education or meaningful work.

Balancing students' needs and demands, the changing employment landscape, and the needs of universities to provide an engaging and relevant education experience, is a pressing reality. One way universities and their faculty have traditionally helped students link theoretical knowledge is by complementing courses with case studies, internships, and community service opportunities. These tools, however, do not easily translate into online courses.

Community service provides students with the opportunity to become active members of their community and sustains a positive, lasting impact on society at large. Community service or volunteerism enables students to

acquire life skills and knowledge, as well as provide a service to those who need it most. Participating in community services has psychological, social, and cognitive benefits to the volunteer. Psychological benefits include an increase in overall life satisfaction, and the act of community service increases students' confidence in themselves and the work they are doing through their university. Community service can also help decrease stress and ease depression (Li & Ferraro, 2005).

In regard to social benefits, volunteering engages students with the community, creates special bonds with the population being served, and increases social awareness and responsibility. Volunteering also helps students enhance their personal knowledge, grow from new experiences, and develop better interpersonal communication skills. Participating in community service activities makes a difference to every student's career prospects by enhancing students' résumés with work-related skills prior to graduation. Community service also builds good references for employers in regard to community involvement and provides a forum to network with future potential employers. In addition, this type of service helps students develop civic and social responsibility skills and become more aware of what their community needs.

While allowing students to enhance their civic engagement and learning, traditional community service in higher education has been shown to benefit other parties as well. Community partners benefit from the students' skills and knowledge, professors fulfill their service requirement, and universities build community relations and meet their community service strategic goals. However, such a face-to-face service-learning approach is maladapted to the increasing demand for online education. As they switch to online platforms, many professors abandon their service-learning

efforts. By removing geographical limitations and transferring on-ground service-learning/community service and engagement to an online platform, e-service-learning holds the potential to transform service-learning and online learning while enhancing student and university engagement.

PART I

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS