

Jacoby, B. (2015). *Service-learning essentials: Questions, answers, and lessons learned*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. 322 pp.

## Review by Glenn A. Bowen

The growth of service-learning in higher education has been phenomenal. Since its full emergence in the mid-1980s, service-learning has found its way into the strategic plans, curricula, and student development programs of colleges and universities across the United States. In fact, 91% of the 434 higher education institutions that responded to a recent national survey offer service-learning courses (*Campus Compact, 2015*); in another national study, approximately 50% of college students reported that they participated in credit-bearing service-learning (*Finley, 2012*). As a pedagogical strategy and civic engagement practice, service-learning has indeed become “part of the permanent landscape of higher education” (*O’Meara, 2011, p. 181*).

Accompanying the growth of service-learning—and perhaps fueling it as well—is a remarkable expansion of the literature produced by practitioners and researchers in the field. A recent contribution is Barbara Jacoby’s *Service-Learning Essentials: Questions, Answers, and Lessons Learned*. Jacoby draws on her extensive experience, and on an ample body of prior research, to produce an informative publication. Organized in a question-and-answer format, *Service-Learning Essentials* provides answers to dozens of questions about service-learning—particularly about its history, nature, purpose, use, scope, and future. In each of the nine chapters, there are six to 13 questions (many with subsidiary questions) and answers, complemented by references to additional information sources and a short summary.

In the introductory chapter, Jacoby distinguishes service-learning from other forms of experiential learning and from the broader concept of civic engagement, and she presents service-learning as a program, pedagogy, and philosophy. Questions about service-learning’s history, theoretical foundations, state of practice, and benefits are answered here. Chapter 2 is all about critical reflection, one of the essential elements of the pedagogy. In addition to identifying various forms of reflection, this chapter outlines steps in designing and facilitating the process. Moreover, it supplies sample reflection questions—some general, others organized by discipline. Service-learning practitioners concerned about the inadequacy of traditional service to achieve social change goals will find an instructive answer to this salient question: “How can

critical reflection empower students to move beyond direct service to other forms of civic and political engagement?” (p. 42)

In Chapter 3, Jacoby explains how to develop and sustain campus–community partnerships as a cornerstone of service-learning. She highlights basic principles that guide authentic, mutually beneficial partnerships; describes various types of partnerships; and delineates nine steps to developing an optimal service-learning partnership. Additionally, the author articulates how such partnerships can lead to broader and deeper institutional engagement with the community.

Chapter 4 goes to the heart of effective service-learning practice among faculty. “Integrating Service-Learning Into the Curriculum” contains answers to 13 questions, more than in any other chapter of the book. For example, there are questions about the appropriateness of service-learning pedagogy for different disciplines and courses, whether service-learning is academically rigorous, assessing and grading service-learning, and the unique elements of a service-learning syllabus. This chapter also offers a rich description of multiple forms of service-learning and a detailed discussion of logistical issues involved in teaching a service-learning course. Furthermore, the chapter addresses the question of service-learning’s place in faculty review, promotion, and tenure.

In Chapter 5 of *Service-Learning Essentials*, Jacoby makes the case for institutions’ design and implementation of cocurricular service-learning. She writes, “Providing a continuum of curricular and co-curricular service-learning experiences contributes to the creation of a seamless learning environment and reinforces the principle that all members of the college community are educators” (p. 153). Student affairs professionals will appreciate the details regarding how service-learning can support student development and contribute to leadership education.

The next chapter covers assessment of service-learning and related partnerships. Given the need to gauge the impact of service-learning on various stakeholders and the challenges inherent in assessment, the author does well to include a whole chapter on this topic. What does service-learning assessment entail? What issues should we consider in choosing assessment methods? How should service-learning be assessed from the community perspective? These are some of the pertinent questions answered. In Chapter 7, the questions and answers focus on administration of service-learning—the institutional infrastructure required, risk-manage-

ment issues, recognition of outstanding work by service-learning participants, and the like.

Chapter 8 provides perspectives on some of the unsettled questions in the service-learning field. Titled “Facing the Complexities and Dilemmas of Service-Learning,” this chapter examines such contentious issues as the appropriateness of service-learning for all students, social justice as the ultimate goal of service-learning, the relationship between service-learning and politics, and disparities between higher education institutions and communities.

In the final chapter, Jacoby presents several strategies for sustaining and advancing service-learning for the benefit of institutions and communities. Questions about institutionalizing service-learning and about service-learning in the online environment are among those answered. Jacoby also emphasizes the need to more fully recognize service-learning alongside community-based research and engaged scholarship in the faculty reward system.

Among the topics covered in more than one chapter is international service-learning. Considering the growing interest in global learning and the attendant challenges (see, for example, *Whitehead, 2015*), this coverage is not surprising. It is difficult enough to handle the details of service-learning administration (including risk management) in domestic settings. Implementing service-learning abroad requires special attention to policies and procedures as well as “pragmatic concerns” (*Jacoby, 2015, p. 218*) usually associated with language and culture, health and safety, and the cost of travel and lodging. Jacoby addresses unintended negative consequences of international service-learning by sharing several examples drawn from the literature (*Crabtree, 2008*). Two examples in particular resonated with me: “service-learning reinforcing for communities that development requires external benefactors” and “members of neighboring communities wondering why no one has come to help them” (*p. 251*).

From the basic to the advanced, from the fundamentals to the complexities, the questions and answers in *Service-Learning Essentials* are stimulating and enlightening. This book is distinguished as much by its comprehensiveness as by its Q&A format. In answering various questions, Jacoby presents a good overview of the defining features of service-learning; salient principles underlying its practice; and tried-and-true procedures in its administration, implementation, and assessment. Administrators and faculty will welcome such practical information at their fingertips at a

time when service-learning has become a mainstay of the college curriculum.

Although drawing heavily on the work of other scholars (as reflected, for example, in the 18 figures/exhibits included in the book), Jacoby infuses a distinct freshness into her responses, offering guidance and support for high-quality service-learning practice. She points to cogent evidence of service-learning's tremendous potential while discouraging an uncritical acceptance of it. Jacoby also notes concomitant challenges and reminds readers that "when not done well, service-learning can have unfortunate effects on students, such as reinforcing their stereotypes and perpetuating the view that service is the most effective means of addressing social issues" (p. xvii).

In the face of the book's many strengths, I would offer one minor criticism. I take issue with the use of the term *service-learners*, as seen repeatedly in this book. *Service-learners* implies that students are simply learning service rather than learning through service. My tongue-in-cheek reaction is that students should not be seen as "service-learners" but rather as "learning servers"!

Almost 20 years after she (as lead author and editor) gave us her first service-learning book (*Jacoby, 1996*), Barbara Jacoby has provided a new resource—and an excellent one, at that. *Service-Learning Essentials* is most suitable for administrators and faculty. Even those who are knowledgeable and experienced in service-learning will benefit from reading this book. It will serve as a refresher, reinvigorating practitioners and practice alike. Although the book will be useful also to graduate students taking service-learning courses or doing research on community-engaged pedagogies, it may be considerably less accessible to community partners who lack a thorough grounding in higher education's approaches to civic engagement. Nevertheless, *Service-Learning Essentials* is a timely resource, especially for practitioners who desire to do service-learning well—or better.

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