

Title: Universities as Civic Institutions - The impacts of practice-based learning exchange on students, third sector organizations and academic staff

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This paper will discuss the role of third-sector organisations in fostering and facilitating the civic engagement of university students. It will report on findings from a mixed-methods study of community engagement through learning and teaching in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Melbourne, Australia.

Universities play an important role in producing graduates with the skills and attributes needed to become community leaders. In light of the changing demands of the 'knowledge society', there has been renewed attention in recent times to the responsibilities that universities have to instil in their graduates civic dispositions toward global citizenship (see Toohey, 1999; Parker, 2003; Barnett et al, 2001; Barnett, 2004). This recognition has been accompanied by a broader discussion about the role of universities as civic institutions (see Boyer 1990). With this growing interest in coordinating community engagement at the University level, this paper will report on a student survey and qualitative case study analysis, which examined the nature and extent of links between faculty staff and external third sector organisations, and the degree to which these links were embraced by both parties and able to foster students' dispositions toward civic engagement.

It is to be hoped that curricula that embed opportunities for civic engagement within the learning experience would allow students and academics alike to build social capital with external third sector organisations. But how does this function in practice? Do students who experience these curricula become more civically engaged? What benefits accrue to the organizations that participate? Does the opportunity to engage with students enrich their practice or simply add to their load? This work addresses the current paucity of research that considers the effects of so-called 'service learning' and related activities on participating third sector organizations.

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