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ABSTRACT

The procedures for awarding academic credit in one particular community service learning program, the University Year for ACTION, were examined through an analysis of the responses to a mail questionnaire sent to all UYA program directors. Almost all of the programs include a fairly traditional academic component that probably has as much, or as little, definition of expected outcomes as typical college courses. Because of the newness of awarding credit for community service learning, there is, and will continue to be, more pressure for a clear definition of the learning outcomes for which credit will be awarded. (Author)

ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES AND COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING: THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY YEAR FOR ACTION[1]

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Modes of non-traditional study at the post-secondary school level are now a focal point of public attention. This interest is a consequence of the perceived needs of new, previously unserved segments of the population, in conjunction with strong dissatisfactions with results from those segments traditionally served. As Hartnett has pointed out, non-traditional study ". . . refers to learning experiences that do not take place under the auspices and supervision of some formally recognized higher educational institution; or it may refer to learning that does take place under such auspices and supervision but differs significantly from the other formal educational efforts taking place there,"[2] The University Year for ACTION is an example of the latter type of non-traditional study; generally it can be characterized as a non-traditional component in a traditional institution. This feature leads to the issues of its relationship to the conventional educational program of the institution and the attitudes of faculty members toward the program. It is also important to note that among current practices in awarding non-traditional credit, i.e., work experience, prior experience, and study abroad, community service is the most recent formof off-campus activity to be credited toward degrees. The University Year for ACTION (UYA), supported by the Federal government, provides an impetus for developing such college programs. That is, the University Year for ACTION has as one of its major goals the combining of community service and academic study in an integrated one-year program. In a recent study,[3] we were able to examine how voluntary service in welfare and social action agencies is fitted into students' academic study programs and the practices and procedures utilized in academic activities.

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[1] A paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, D.C., April 2, 1975

At this point, a brief description of the University Year for ACTION is in order. On July 1, 1971, ACTION, a federal agency which combined the Peace Corps with VISTA and several specialized volunteer programs was established with a mandate from the Congress and the President to devise new forms of voluntary public service. The University Year for ACTION was the first such program; it was established under Title VIII of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. The program allows students to work for one year in full-time voluntary jobs with community agencies and organizations focusing on the solution of specific poverty problems while receiving, in most cases, a full year's academic credit. The volunteer lives in the community where he works at the level of his clients. UYA operates through grants to universities who select, train and supervise the volunteer and provide academic credit and a learning system for him. The community organizations provide field direction and supervision and ACTION is responsible for subsistence allowances, volunteer benefits, financial and technical program support.

Two features of the program should be emphasized so that the design of the study can be better understood:

(1) Participation in UYA is open to all undergraduates and graduate students. In 1972, nine percent of the participants were in their freshman year, 23 percent were in the sophomore class, 35 percent were juniors, 22 percent were seniors, and 11 percent were graduate students.[4]

(2) The student earns a full year of credit in courses related to his community service project. For example, working in a consumer protection agency may earn credits in economics, sociology, or urban studies, depending on the student's major field and on laboratory work supervised by a faculty member.

There is noticeable variation among the programs in the type and form of academic work expected of the volunteers and in its relationship to their community service project. We will examine two dimensions of this variation: (1) the relationship of the academic program to the student's major field and (2) the relationship of the academic program to community service activities.

Relationship of academic program to major field

UYA Briefing notes that "high quality field performance has resulted from . . . the matching of volunteer talents (e.g., business, architecture, medicine, etc.) with high priority needs."[5] Since volunteer talent is defined in terms of academic majors, and community service activities and academic work are to be interpreted, we expected that the student's academic program would be related to his major.

The program director's responses to our question, "To what extent is an undergarduate's academic program related to his major field during this year as a volunteer?" supported our line of reasoning. Thirty-one of 35 directors responded that the students' academic program and major were somewhat related or more (Table 1).[6] Looked at the other way, no program director reported that the students' academic work and major field were unrelated. Since experience related to a student's major prior to graduation is generally regarded as highly desirable, this characteristic may facilitate the institutionalization of the UYA program at participating institutions.

Relationship of academic program to community service activities

To measure whether the objective of integrating community service and academic study in a one-year program has been achieved, we asked about the

relationship between an undergraduate (graduate) student's academic program and his community service activities. Most of the program directors (62 percent) responded that some but not all of the program is related to the student's community service activities (Table 2). Slightly over one-third of the program directors indicated that academic work and experiential learning have been integrated. Only one program director reported that there is no relationship between the academic program and service activities in his institution. The achievement of this objective depends on a number of factors such as the nature of the traditional education program in the institution, the present credit structure, administrator-faculty relationships, faculty attitudes, and administrative procedures which, of course, vary by institution.

A non-traditional educational component at a traditional institution, such as the University Year for ACTION, may be unconventional in any one of several ways, for example, the type of student enrolled or the methods of instruction. Apart from the requirement of ACTION that course obligations should not interfere with the performance of the volunteer's service to an agency or project, the participating institutions determine the nature of the academic activities that comprise the UYA program. To what extent and in what ways, then, are the academic practices of colleges and universities participating in the University Year for ACTION non-traditional and in what ways traditional?

Instructional activities

The methods of instruction utilized in the UYA program in the sponsoring institutions are an important indicator of the degree to which it

is actually a traditional or conventional program. When the 40 program directors were asked which of nine kinds of academic activities most UYA undergraduates were engaged in, the activities most frequently cited were independent reading, papers, a journal and/or reports on the community service job, conferences with faculty, and UYA seminars. (Table 3.) Activities of this type are not unknown in conventional academic programs, but they are less common than formal courses, which were mentioned by relatively few program directors as being an activity for most UYA students. A notable aspect of the responses to the question was the wide variety of academic activities expected of the students. At all but eight institutions, it was reported that most students were involved in at least five different activities. The effort to develop a non-traditional component at traditional institutions has apparently resulted in instructional activities which are neither completely traditional nor radically non-traditional.

Courses

The guidelines for the University Year for ACTION state that credit must be earned "in courses offered by the program sponsor, in special courses offered by the program sponsor, or in courses offered for transferred credit in other institutions at a comparable level." Three-quarters of the directors reported that, when students did take formal course work, most of the courses were either regular ones as listed in the institution's catalog or regular ones "adapted for UYA students." At the remaining eight institutions, most of those courses were "for UYA students only."

Learning options

To determine to what extent non-traditional instructional methods are used in the University Year for ACTION, we asked the program directors how much

each of 13 types of "learning situations" was used by students, and which one of them was "the major means of learning." As Table 4 shows, the activities cited by far the most frequently in both respects were field work, independent reading, and seminars. At only two institutions were traditional classroom lectures getting "much" use as a learning situation, and at only one were they a major means of learning. Yet the unconventional methods of instruction -- the newer educational technologies such as programmed or computer-assisted instruction, or instruction with some utilization of telephone, tape cassettes, or radio, or television -- received "some" use at still fewer institutions and were almost never named as a major means of learning.

These two questions were asked in a survey conducted in 1972 on behalf of the Commission on Non-Traditional Study, in which 1,185 higher educational institutions furnished information about "specially-designed programs based on new or unconventional forms of education free of the time or place limitations of traditional classroom instruction," including programs that were unconventional in methods of instruction.[7] Comparison of the responses to the questions in that survey with the responses to the same questions in the present study suggests that UYA programs were as non-traditional in their methods of instruction as were other programs asserted to be in this category. For example, computer-assisted instruction and instruction with tape cassettes or with telephone, radio, or television were not a major means of learning in any of the 351 programs accepted by the survey directors as meeting the criteria of "non-traditional" and programmed instruction was a major means in only six percent. Large differences between the survey responses and those given by the UYA program directors appeared on only two items: traditional classroom lectures were said to be a major means of learning in 37 percent of the non-traditional programs, as against only three

percent of the UYA programs, while field work was said to be a major means in only 16 percent of the non-traditional programs but in 54 percent of the UYA programs.[8] It is clear that, even when compared to other non-traditional programs, the UYA programs rely heavily on field work as a method of academic learning, which is consonant with UYA objectives.

Faculty

Who comprise the faculty for the UYA program? Our data show that a member of the regular faculty bore some responsibility for the conduct of the UYA academic activities at nearly all of the institutions (see Table 5). At eight of them, a regular faculty member bore sole responsibility; at ten, he shared it with the UYA program director and/or staff; at 13, with these people as well as with a community-agency supervisor and/or a student (presumably a UYA volunteer); and at four, with either or both of the latter but without the program director or staff. At the remaining four institutions, the UYA program director carried responsibility for academic activities together with some combination of his staff, an agency supervisor, and a student. It is interesting to note that students themselves bore some of this responsibility at 11 institutions, though always together with at least one other person.

Teaching duties in the academic parts of the UYA program were apparently more heavily concentrated on faculty members who had the usual credentials (Table 6). The regular faculty, i.e., "those who teach conventional programs as well," comprised a majority of the UYA faculty at 31 institutions. At only three institutions did "special instructors from the community, professions, business, industry, or the arts" make up a majority of the UYA faculty, although persons of this type were a minority of the faculty at 13 institutions. This distribution

is somewhat more weighted on the "conventional" side than was the case in the national survey of non-traditional programs; regular faculty constituted a majority in 62 percent of these programs while special instructors were a majority in 16 percent.[9]

Scheduling of instruction

Does a non-traditional component such as the UYA program differ from conventional programs in the timing of instruction? To determine this, we asked the directors: "When is instruction, other than field work, for undergraduates (graduate students) in the UYA program scheduled?" Instruction was being carried on in the late afternoon or the evening at 27 institutions, on weekends at nine, in blocks of several days periodically in nine, and for one (presumable entire) weekday at four (Table 7). Two others reported that scheduling was "flexible" or "varied" for at least some courses, and two said the question was not applicable because their academic activities were in the form of independent study. Ordinary daytime hours were utilized at 15 institutions. From these responses, it is obvious that many institutions were scheduling instruction during more than one of the time periods mentioned.[10] On the whole, the faculty members of UYA programs were teaching at unconventional times, in order to fit the volunteers' work demands.

Location of learning activities

To find out where instruction takes place, we asked, "Where is the principal location of learning activities for undergraduates (graduate students) in the UYA program?" At 25 UYA programs, all instruction took place at the community agency site and/or "in the field," and nine others used both their

campus and a community or field site. At only five was instruction restricted to the main campus (Table 8)."

In sum, the academic work expected of the UYA volunteers mirrors fairly conventional academic activities, albeit at a different time and place. If the UYA programs hew fairly closely to traditional practices in many respects, it is not because their directors lack faith in the programs' effectiveness as a learning experience. When asked for their opinion about the relative effectiveness of community service as a learning experience, most directors said that it was more effective than regular college courses, "validation through standardized examinations," correspondence study, and work experience, and that it was equally effective with study abroad and "coordinated non-traditional programs, e.g., the University without Walls" (Table 9). More than four of the directors rated community service as being a less effective learning experience than any of the six other modes of learning with which they were asked to compare it.

The explanation, rather, may lie in restraints on the programs originating elsewhere within the institution. When asked about 17 issues which may "have posed difficulties or obstacles for your institution in development of non-traditional programs, opportunities for non-traditional students, or new policies regarding the award and acceptance of credit," two-thirds of the directors said that the "institution's concern about its academic standards" and "difficulty in assessing non-classroom learning" had indeed created problems at their institutions. These proportions were substantially higher than the percentages reporting difficulties over the same issues (34 and 40 percent, respectively)

among the institutions covered in the survey of non-traditional programs.[12] Perhaps the institutions, in order to reassure themselves about these matters, insisted that the UYA programs follow certain familiar procedures, particularly in the modes of instruction and the selection of instructors, or perhaps the program directors complied with these procedures on their own initiative to forestall objections.

Assuming that the directors feel that a strong case can be made for the distinctive procedures of the UYA program (as their belief in its effectiveness as a learning experience would indicate), there is some evidence that they also believe that these problems could be overcome if they had more opportunity to present their case to the regular faculty or if the faculty had more opportunity to observe the UYA program at first hand. The most frequent suggestion for needed improvement in the program procedures was closer relationships between the UYA staff and program and the regular faculty and program. Active participation by the regular faculty in the UYA program might give it greater strength and respectability at the institution. Indeed, if this suggestion is acted upon, academic activities in the University Year for ACTION in the future could be determined by the acknowledged contributions of community service learning and not so much by the need to maintain a high level of academic "legitmacy."

Footnotes

[1]The work reported herein was performed pursuant to a contract with ACTION, Washington, D.C. 20525. The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and should not be construed as representing the opinions or policy of any agency of the United States Government.

[2]Rodney T. Hartnett, "Non-Traditional Study: An Overview" in Samuel B. Gould and K. Patricia Cross (eds.), Explorations in Non-Traditional Study (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1972), p. 14.

[3]Anne E. Trask, Robert A. Feldmesser, and Ernest W. Kimmel, The Awarding of Academic Credit in the University Year for ACTION: Policies and Practices (Princeton, New Jersey: Educational Testing Service, mimeographed, February, 1974). To describe the academic activities involved in granting academic credit, information was obtained from the 53 colleges and universities who are now participating in the program, i.e., the entire population. Nine of the institutions participate in a consortium, so that 44 University Year for ACTION programs are included in the study. Forty of the 44 UYA program directors actually participated in the study, thus representing 91 percent of the original study population. For more detail about the design of the study, see Trask, Feldmesser, and Kimmel, Chapter One.

[4]Arlene Krimgold, Everything You Always Wanted to Know About UYA* (Washington, D.C.: ACTION, September, 1972), p. 54.

[5]UYA Briefing, n.d., p. 12.

[6]The responses to the questions concerning undergraduate and graduate students were the same in most cases. Inasmuch as 89 percent of the UYA volunteers are undergraduates, the findings presented in this article focus on them except where the findings relative to graduate students are different.

[7]Janet Ruyle et al., Non-Traditional Programs and Opportunities in American Colleges and Universities 1972 (Berkeley, California: Center for Research and Development in Higher Education, 1972), p. 7.

[8]Ibid., p. 35.

[9]Ibid., p. 41.

[10]The non-traditional programs in the national survey made somewhat more use of daytime hours and somewhat less use of late afternoons and evenings. (J. Ruyle et al., op. cit., p. 36.

[11]Though a similar question was asked in the survey of non-traditional programs, the results are not comparable. The national survey asked for "one primary learning site," whereas the UYA question made no such limitation. As a result, only about 11 percent of respondents to the former gave multiple sites, compared to about half (20 of 39) of the respondents to the latter.

[12]Ruyle et al., op. cit., p. 65.

Table 1. Directors' Report of Relationship Between Undergraduate Student's Academic Program and Major Field

(N=35)

Response	Number of Directors
Very related	17
Somewhat related	14
Related	4
Somewhat unrelated	0
Very unrelated	0
Total	35

Table 2. Directors' Report of Relationship Between Undergraduate Student's Academic Program and Community Service Activities

(N=34)

Response	Number of Directors
Entire program fits with student's community service activities	12
Some of the program fits student's community service activities	21
No relationship between academic program and service activities	1
Total	34

Table 3. Kinds of Academic Activities in Which UYA Undergraduate Students Are Engaged

(N=39)

Academic Activity	Number of Mentions
Independent reading	37
Papers	34
Journal and/or reports on job	33
Conferences with Faculty	31
UYA seminars at job or university	30
Faculty visits	23
Learning contracts	23
Examinations	17
Formal classes	13
Total	241

Table 4. Use of Learning Situations by UYA Undergraduate Students

(N=39)

Learning Situation	Amount of Use				Number of Directors Reporting the Method as a Major Means of Learning
	Much	Some	None	No Answer	
Lectures	2	17	16	4	1
Seminars	20	19	0	0	10
Independent reading	25	13	0	1	14
Tutorial	3	16	15	5	1
Programmed instruction	0	8	26	5	1
Computer-assisted instruction	0	2	31	6	0
Tape cassette instruction	0	8	25	6	0
Talk-back telephone instruction	1	6	26	6	0
Closed-circuit live talk-back television	0	1	32	6	0
Closed-circuit TV or videotapes, no feedback	0	2	31	6	0
Broadcast radio, TV	0	4	29	6	0
Field work	32	6	0	1	21
Correspondence	8	12	13	6	1
Other	5	2	2	30	4

Table 5. Directors' Report of Faculty Responsible for Academic Activities of UYA Undergraduate Students

(N=39)

Faculty	Number of Directors
Faculty member only	8
Faculty member and UYA director	4
Faculty member and UYA staff	2
Faculty member and UYA director and staff	4
Faculty member, UYA director and/or staff, and agency supervisor	7
Faculty member, UYA director and/or staff, and agency supervisor and/or student	6
Faculty member, agency supervisor, and/or student	4
UYA program director and/or UYA staff, and agency supervisor and/or student	4
Total	39

Table 6. Types of Faculty Teaching UYA Undergraduate Students

(N=39)

Types of Faculty	Number of Directors Checking Each Type as Being: Majority of UYA Faculty	Minority of UYA Faculty	None or No Answer
Regular faculty, who teach conventional programs as well	30	4	5
Separate faculty of the institution	2	4	33
Special instructors from community, professions, industry, arts	3	13	23
Other	1	4	34

Table 7. Scheduling of Instruction for UYA Undergraduate Students

(N=37)

Scheduling of Instruction	Number of Mentions
Daytime	15
Late afternoon and evening	27
Weekends	9
One weekday	6
Blocks of several days	9
Other	7
Total	73

Table 8. Principal Location of Learning Activities for UYA Undergraduate Students

(N=39)

Location	Number of Mentions
Main campus	14
Regional learning/ extension center	0
Business or industrial site	1
At community agency or center	21
In the field	28
Total	64

Table 9. Comparison of the Effectiveness of Community Service with Other Ways of Earning Academic Credit

(N=40)

Other Ways of Earning Credit	Number of Directors Responding that Community Service Is: More effective	Less effective	Same	No Answer
Correspondence study	27	0	3	10
Work experience	20	1	13	6
Study abroad	9	4	15	12
Coordinated non-traditional programs, e.g., The University Without Walls	9	3	18	10
Validation through standardized examinations	24	3	5	8
Regular college courses	22	4	7	7