Community Work-Study as a High Impact Practice: Designing a work-based, community-engaged experiential learning opportunity to increase access for under-resourced college students

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For many institutions of higher education, naming and elevating a set of "High Impact [Educational] Practices" (HIPs; Kuh, 2008) has become one of the key strategies to engage students in deeper disciplinary learning, personal growth, and success in college and beyond. We know from the literature on HIPs that these types of educational experiences take the form of experiential or applied learning opportunities such as service learning, internships, and study away, and, when done well, are transformative for students (Kuh, 2008). A key finding in Kuh's research is that these high-impact practices, while beneficial for everyone, are especially impactful among traditionally under-resourced student populations (especially first generation students and students of color) and that, demographically speaking, these students who stand to benefit the most are the ones engaging in them the least. One barrier to access we can note is that because HIPs take a significant investment of time and effort, often outside of the assigned class schedule, they are not always accessible to students who need to spend their time outside of class working in order to pay for school or support themselves and their families.

Higher education as a whole is a significant financial investment, and often financial barriers impact student success. Considering the demographics of today's college students, it is important to note that 47% are financially independent, which means they are not relying on another family member for financial support. Of that 47%, 42% of those financially independent college students are living in poverty (Lumina Foundation, 2018). 58% of today's college students are working while attending school full time and one third of today's students are low-income (Lumina Foundation, 2018). An increasing number of today's college students are first generation. Most first generation students "frequently need to be employed" to help pay for their education and the cost of living (Stebleton, 2013, p.8). Knowing that HIPs are especially beneficial to the growth and success of under-resourced students, we must turn our attention to breaking down the barriers to access and creating opportunities to make HIPs and HIP-like practices more accessible to them. Two recent MDRC studies indicated that a limited financial aid award ($1,000) for students struggling with economic challenges can make a difference in their college success, including higher term to term retention rates for those students (Lumina Foundation, 2018). Knowing the difference that financial aid can make, we have an opportunity to take an existing financial aid program and reframe it as a potential HIP—that of Community Work-Study.

This essay considers what might be involved in reframing Community Work-Study (CWS) as a potential HIP -- not only a form of financial aid or student employment but also an educational opportunity that can, if designed accordingly, advance civic and career development and the transformative learning of HIPs. A subset of Federal Work Study, CWS provides the opportunity for eligible students to work in meaningful jobs that not only give them applied learning experiences but also contribute to meeting community-identified goals. It is a bit of a hidden gem in the midst of other forms of community engagement (i.e., service learning, community service, days of service). College students are able to earn money to support their education while community organizations are able to hire student employees in a cost effective way; nonprofit and government organizations pay 25% of a student's wages, with the other 75% of the hourly rates being subsidized by the federal government. CWS can thus be described as a win-win opportunity to advance the goals of both higher education institutions and their community partners.

With this in mind, we have an opportunity to further develop our understanding and our practice of CWS as a HIP, specifically, a community-engaged HIP that is by definition particularly accessible to the population of students who often have the least access to but benefit the most from HIPs. After a brief background on federal and community work study, this essay examines four dimensions of learning, designing Community Work-Study as a form of community engagement and experiential learning, and implications for future practice and design. The underlying goal of this essay is to posit, explore, and call for further development of "Community Engaged Work Study": CWS designed as a HIP that incorporates the best practices of civic learning and experiential learning.

History and Practice of Federal Work-Study and Community Work-Study

The Federal Work-Study (FWS) program was established as part of the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964, the goal of which was to combat poverty in the United States. The EOA states:

> The United States can achieve its full economic and social potential as a nation only if every individual has the opportunity to contribute to the full extent of his capabilities and to participate in the workings of our society. It is, therefore, the policy of the United States to eliminate the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty in this Nation by opening to everyone the opportunity for education and training, the opportunity to work, and the opportunity to live in decency and dignity. ("A Brief History")

The FWS program, as part of this EOA, was established to "stimulate and promote the part-time employment of students in institutions of higher education who are from low-income families and are in need of the earnings from such employment to pursue courses of study at such institutions" ("A Brief History"). This evolved into the Higher Education Act of 1965, which was revised in 1972 to also include the Work Study for Community Service Learning Program (which is now more commonly known as Community Work-Study or CWS).

CWS was designed to allow students opportunities to work in local community-serving organizations (such as local nonprofit, government, and community-based organizations) doing work that is "designed to improve the quality of life for community residents, particularly

low-income individuals, or to solve particular problems related to their needs" ("A Brief History"). Community agencies who qualify, through a non-profit or government designation, are able to hire college students with FWS awards while only paying 25% of the student's wages, with the other 75% being matched by the federal government. Additionally, beginning with the President Clinton administration's 1997 "America Reads Challenge," a special stipulation allows for agencies employing reading and math tutors to hire students with 100% of the students' wages covered by the federal government.

At its heart and historical, legislative inception, FWS (and, more specifically, CWS) was designed to eliminate barriers to pursue higher education while also providing a mechanism for enacting the public purposes of higher education. As a need-based form of financial aid, FWS meets today's college students where they are, offering paid work opportunities to traditionally under-resourced students, students who do not typically have access to high impact or deeply engaged practices (Kuh, 2008). Designing paid work as a civically engaged high impact practice (via CWS) creates educationally meaningful work experiences that will allow students to deepen and connect their learning processes to processes of improving the quality of life in communities.

Community Work-Study as a High Impact Practice

As we consider the purposes of higher education, two main categories of thought tend to dominate the conversation: higher education as a space to prepare graduates as informed and active citizens and higher education as a space for career preparation and workforce development. These perceived "dual purposes" are often seen to be in tension with one another (Bringle, Edwards, Clayton, 2014, p.13). However, in "Connecting Workforce Development and Civic Engagement: Higher Education as Public Good and Private Gain," Battistoni and Longo (2006) explore prospects for moving beyond the perception of divergence between these two prevalent visions of higher education's role in society. "Put simply," they write, "workforce development and civic engagement can be complementary visions for the future of higher education" (p. 2). Similarly, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), employers are seeking graduates who are critical thinkers and problem solvers, work well in teams and collaborate across difference, demonstrate integrity and ethical behavior, and are globally and interculturally fluent ("Career Readiness Defined") -- characteristics that are clearly both civic-oriented as well as career-oriented.

Community Work-Study has the potential to integrate these two visions of civic and career development and be more than just a job for students with demonstrated financial need. When designed to explicitly engage in and with the broader community, it is an experience that can combine the principles of internships and service learning that make them HIPs. But it is more than an internship, and it is more than service learning. As a financial aid funding source for traditionally under-resourced students, CWS increases opportunities for more students, especially under-resourced students, to engage in high impact-type learning experiences. Additionally, students receive their FWS funding over the course of multiple semesters and academic years. This ongoing funding allows for students to continue in their community-based positions beyond the boundaries of the one semester or quarter or summer internship or service learning course. This continuation of the experience over time adds an opportunity for increased capacity building for the community organization (being able to rely and build upon the knowledge and experience of the same student over time rather than continuing to train new students) as well as increases opportunities for deeper student learning and development.

Two examples of institutions doing significant work in reframing student employment as a high impact learning practice are The University of Iowa and Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI). University of Iowa Vice President for Student Life Assessment and Strategic Initiatives, Sarah Hansen, found research documenting the learning benefits of Federal Work-Study and decided to capitalize on that by developing a structure to help supervisors have intentional conversations with their students and intentionally connect their academic learning with their work experience ("Connecting Work and Learning"). The initiative is called "Iowa GROW," which stands for Guided Reflection on Work. IUPUI has developed a similar program through their Hire Achievers program, a campus-wide career and professional readiness program led by Office of Student Employment director Janna McDonald, connecting students' work experience directly to the university's Profiles of Learning for Undergraduate Success. The Office of Student Employment selects departments to participate and designate a supervisor to maintain established contact with their students and engage in specifically designed interventions to help students develop in core areas of professional persona and professional competency ("Hire Achievers").

First, we must consider what it would take to design CWS as a HIP. The literature generally identifies four key characteristics of HIPs, which are easily linked to current CWS practice:

    1. Demand students devote considerable time and effort: CWS generally involves 8-10 hours per week of work.
    2. Demand substantive interaction with faculty and peers over periods of time: CWS allows for substantive interaction with community supervisors, and possibly with peers, over the course of an academic year and possibly multiple academic years.
    3. Involve interaction across difference: CWS offers this by placing students in community settings that are both likely different from the campus community (and perhaps from their own home communities) and likely to expose them first-hand to a range of individuals from varied backgrounds.
    4. Frequent feedback on performance: CWS sometimes offers this, depending on the relationship between students and their community supervisors.

Each of these four characteristics of HIPs suggests clear approaches to enhancing current CWS practice, which is already fairly well-aligned with these principles. The time and effort involved can be examined through the lens of what we know about applied and experiential learning. Substantive interaction with faculty can be specified and translated to potentially similar interactions with community supervisors serving as co-educators; and it is important to note that this is but one example of how the translation can work both ways, with the potential to enhance our understanding and practice of HIPs through examination of other high quality student experiences. The community-based positions can be marketed to students with at least a partial eye to similarities and differences between sites and the communities students are most familiar with. And supervisors' roles and responsibilities as well as the nature of their interactions with students can be designed to formalize regular feedback and critical reflection.

Second, we must consider what it would it mean for CWS to be enhanced further, explicitly incorporating best practices of both internships and service learning, the two HIPs it is arguably most closely related to. Kuh (2008) sees internships as HIPs in part because they "provide students with direct experience in a work setting – usu-

ally related to their career interests – and to give them the benefit of supervision and coaching from professionals in the field" (p. 21). He sees service learning as a HIP in part because it "give[s] students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community [as they] … both apply what they are learning in real-world settings and reflect … on their service experiences" (p. 11). CWS already accomplishes some of this, and, again, it is not difficult to see what would be involved in drawing on these two related practices to further enhance it: primarily, a bit of formalizing of the relationship between student and supervisor for more consistent and deeper coaching and making some space for intentional meaning making (i.e., critical reflection).

Third, we must consider what it would mean for CWS to be understood and designed explicitly as an experiential learning opportunity. Bringle and Plater (2017) suggest that "good experiential education" includes four components: content and learning objectives, activities, systematic reflection that connects the content with the activities so as to generate the desired learning, and assessment of that learning. While they limit their discussion of experiential learning to credit-based contexts (i.e., courses), it is not difficult to see what applying these characteristics to CWS would involve and how doing so would make it a much richer learning opportunity. To better understand the learning potential of CWS experiences, we can look to King and Sweitzer's (2014) "Towards a Pedagogy of Internships," which suggests organizing the learning developed via internships in the following four dimensions: Professional, Academic, Personal, and Civic. These four learning dimensions are consistent with the learning dimensions that have been articulated by Ash and Clayton (2009) and Felten and Clayton (2011) as defining of service learning: academic learning, personal growth, and civic learning. Here again, it is clear that CWS is already fairly well-aligned with these HIPs and can be enhanced without drastic rework.

The professional dimension
Students may seek CWS positions simply as a form of financial aid as a way to pay for school. Others may see it as an opportunity to explore a potential career interest. No matter the initial interest, CWS is employment and, for many students, may be their first experience within a traditional office environment. Much like internships, CWS positions have the potential to integrate and socialize students into the norms and

practices of particular professions and professional settings generally. Programs such as Iowa GROW and IUPUI Hire Achievers have created coaching models and prompts for helping students make these professional connections.

The academic dimension

Federal Work-Study (and subsequently Community Work-Study) by design is expected to connect students with jobs that are academically relevant. These jobs support students to continue their education while allowing students opportunities to integrate classroom knowledge in community-based experiences. Tools such as critical reflection can help supervisors intentionally support students in drawing upon their classroom learning as they examine it in action at their community organization (Ash and Clayton, 2009). Critical reflection can deepen the learning for the accounting student who is helping examine a nonprofit's fiscal sources, the video production student who uses video editing skills to create a memorable video to help a nonprofit better tell their impact story, or the teacher education student who watches how a significant scheduling change, informed by educational theory, at an after school site increases learners' homework completion rate.

The personal dimension

Higher education knows it has a crucial role in helping students develop "soft skills" as employers are increasingly expecting employees to have developed these skills prior to hiring (Battistoni & Longo, 2006). Working in a community-based position has the opportunity to help a student develop these types of skills while connecting a larger sense of purpose to the work they are doing. The CWS experience, much like other part-time work experiences including internships, is an opportunity for students to discover more about their strengths, clarify their personal values, better understand their ability to handle challenging situations, and to develop a sense of personal agency. These positions will also provide opportunities for working with diverse others, helping students learn how to navigate situations in which others think and apply knowledge differently than them.

The civic dimension

The "soft skills" discussed in workforce development literature and the "civic skills" discussed in the community engagement literature have considerable overlap (Battistoni & Longo, 2006). When working for an

organization dedicated to serving vulnerable populations or identified community needs, students from across disciplines are able to put their work and skills into a larger social context and see them in action. And this does not only apply to the nonprofit sphere, since every profession has a type of "implicit contract with society to fulfill certain moral and ethical obligations" (King & Sweitzer, 2014, p. 40). CWS experiences can give students a glimpse into what it takes to uphold that social contract, what happens when it fails, and what their role (and their organization's role) is in addressing complex social justice issues.

Community Work-Study as Community Engagement

It is similarly helpful to look at CWS through the lens of what we know about high quality community-engaged learning and community-campus engagement more generally. Three key principles -- co-creation and co-education, critical reflection to generate and deepen learning and work, and, here again, civic learning goals -- can help guide the refinement of current practice in the direction of "Community Engaged Work Study."

Co-creation and co-education

One of the principles of democratic community engagement is the idea that knowledge is generated across stakeholders; counter-normative to technocratic engagement, knowledge is co-developed, breaking down the norm of knowledge "producers" and knowledge "consumers" (Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009, p. 10). Designated coaching conversations, like those in the Iowa GROW and IUPUI Hire Achievers programs, create space for employers to work with students to co-develop positions that meet the students' identified personal and professional goals. Also, because students typically qualify for Federal Work-Study for multiple semesters, many CWS sites are able to hire the same student over multiple semesters, not bound by a 16 week internship or service learning limitation. The on-going potential of CWS relationships allows agencies the time and opportunity to work with a student as she grows professionally to continue co-designing work that benefits and builds agency capacity while helping the student continue to grow and develop personally and professionally.

Critical Reflection

Critical reflection, when well designed, "promotes significant learning, including problem solving skills, higher order reasoning, integrative thinking, goal clarification, openness to new ideas, ability to adopt new perspectives, and systemic thinking" (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Conrad & Hedin, 1987, as summarized in Ash & Clayton, 2009, p. 27). It offers a way to deepen and document learning (Ash & Clayton, 2009). The civic, academic, and personal learning is drawn out through carefully designed and implemented critical reflection. As in the Iowa GROW and IUPUI Hire Achievers programs, critical reflection prompts used during regularly scheduled supervisory coaching sessions with students can help students make valuable connections between their work experiences, the classroom learning experiences, themselves, and society.

Civic Learning

Civic learning refers to the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to be an effective member of society (Saltmarsh, 2005). There is a clear opportunity for civic learning when students are working directly in and with community organizations. Engaging with organizations in the public sphere offers students the chance to learn more about social issues, the ways in which they are addressed in society, and how they themselves personally engage society and view their role in addressing complex social problems. There are also ways for employers to measure their students' civic learning. Two highly regarded tools for measuring civic learning were developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI). AAC&U developed the Civic Engagement VALUE Rubric (AAC&U, 2009) to help evaluate civic learning. The IUPUI Center for Service and Learning framed a definition for a Civic-Minded Graduate and a subsequent rubric to assess its particular domains (Steinberg, Hatcher, & Bringle, 2011)

Implications for Future Practice and Design

We can connect what we know from the High Impact Practice literature, specifically the practice of service learning, and design for Community Engaged Work Study (CEWS) that goes beyond work that just happens to take place in the community. Knowing the potential for CWS to be designed as an applied/experiential and engaged learning opportunity, to develop graduates prepared for the workforce and for contributions to civic life, we should consider designing CEWS with the following key principles:

1. *Develop supervisors as civic mentors and co-educators:* Design tools and provide training to support our CWS supervisors in coming alongside students in their learning and development. Help supervisors to understand themselves as more than just a supervisor; develop onboarding and on-going training modules to help supervisors understand their roles as co-educators and civic mentors (Norris, 2016).

2. *Integrate on-going critical reflection:* Using Iowa GROW or IUPUI Hire Achievers as a model, create civic (and other) learning prompts connected to student experience (i.e., How did this experience help you better understand your organization's mission/purpose or key social issues addressed by your organization? What role did working with others at this organization play in this experience?) to help students go beyond the academic and career connection and connect what they are learning to their role in civic life. Include training in critical reflection models in supervisor and student onboarding.

3. *Asset-based job development:* Coach employers on looking beyond CWS as a way to fill a job functioning gap and to see CESW as an opportunity to increase their capacity to continue engaging in their mission. Invite them to consider designing positions in which a student can grow over time and increase their impact at the agency.

4. *Intentional learning about the non-profit and public sector:* Work with CWS agencies to design learning modules, briefs, or other resources that help students understand the larger role and impact of non-profit and government agencies to address complex social issues. Understanding the role of the non-profit sector in society is "an important dimension in understanding public problem solving in civil society" (Hatcher & Studer, 2015, p. 13).

5.   *Potential for taxonomy:* Following in the stead of the IUPUI HIP taxonomies, specifically the IUPUI taxonomy on service learning courses (Hahn, T., et. al, 2016), a review of the internships and service learning literature alongside our current learning about the potential to design CWS for deeper engagement, a taxonomy could be created to help create a baseline from which campuses can begin designing their CWS as Community Engaged Work-Study.

Institutions interested in moving forward with designing Community Work-Study as a high impact practice should first consider the offices and/or staff that currently play a role in both Federal Work-Study (and Community Work-Study if different) as well as designing and implementing high impact practices, especially that of experiential and/or service learning. At IUPUI, a triad office approach to implementing CWS has had success in running a strong program, with the Office of Student Financial Services (Financial Aid), the Office of Student Employment, and the Center for Service and Learning coming together to co-design policies and practices from the initial vetting and approving of community agencies to the financial awarding of students to the hiring and supporting of students as employees. A full review of the current implementation of CWS is warranted as each institution considers what elements of CEWS currently exist in their programming and which ones could be added and/or strengthened by what is being suggested in this essay. A working group could then look at each of the proposed key principles for design and consider what a year one, year two, year three (and so forth) implementation might look like.

When we can design CWS with each of these principles, we can move beyond a program that is community-based (work in communities) and toward a program that is community-engaged (work and learning in and with communities). In doing so, we create opportunities for students to gain access to meaningful community engagement experiences and invest in the development of future generations of civically-minded graduates who have the commitments and the capacities to nudge our world into a more equitable and just place for all.

Challenges and Questions for Further Inquiry

There remain challenges to be addressed and opportunities for further inquiry when designing for Community Engaged Work-Study (CEWS). As with any community-based opportunity, it is important to note that there is an inherent need for transportation to get to a community site. The additional cost of a car or public transportation may remain a barrier to students who qualify for Federal Work-Study. There may be opportunities to look at on-campus, community-facing types of Federal Work-Study jobs (e.g., campus food pantry, campus-based community garden) that do not require transportation off campus and yet still address and work with quality of life factors in the community. The term "community" can and should be explored more in depth to determine what can qualify for the purposes of Community Engaged Work-Study positions.

When designing for CEWS, it will be important to honor the principles of mutual benefit and co-creation with community partners from the start. If designed within and by the institution without intentional co-creation, the design will focus on the institutional desires for outcomes and can serve to alienate partners or create design elements counter to the missions of these organizations. It is important to ensure that all stakeholders (students included) have an opportunity to contribute to a shared understanding of the value of designing a more engaged CWS program.

Research is needed to establish evidence that CEWS is an engagement opportunity that increases access to High Impact Practices and prepares students for participation in civic life. Programs like the national Bonner Scholars program and America Reads and America Counts are potential places to start enacting some of the suggested design elements for CEWS to begin monitoring their outcomes and potential for impact.

Conclusion

A crucial design element to be considered with any learning opportunity is the consideration of who has access to that opportunity and who does not. By its own design Community Work-Study (CWS) is a funding mechanism that financially supports under-resourced college students and creates access to engaging with the community outside of some of the traditional forms of engagement that may otherwise be inaccessible to these students due to commitments of time and potentially other resources.

The deeply influential Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) report entitled *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future* (National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012), names financial incentives and Federal Work-Study in particular as one place to increase access for students. In the report, there is a call for the creation of "financial incentives for students, including first-generation students and those studying in career and occupational fields, to facilitate their access to college while expanding their civic capacities as part of their education" (National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012, p. 37). Suggestions include "expan[ding] … beyond the current federal government requirement that at least 7 percent of Federal Work-Study monies fund student jobs in community-based placements" and leveraging such programs that direct funding toward access, "investigat[ing] how to profitably adapt them to foster expanded civic capacities and hands-on public problem solving" (p. 37). This call for access is still deeply relevant today. As we recognize the need for more integration of civic and career development, and as we work towards increasing access to high impact education practices such as experiential learning to do this, we need to just as equally be concerned with who has access to those practices.

As we consider how we continue to integrate civic learning and workforce development with the additional goal of "full participation" by all students (Sturm, Eatman, Saltmarsh, & Bush, 2011, p. 4), CWS has the potential to go beyond the transactional system of employment and actually be a transformational HIP experience for both students and communities. Designing with HIPs in mind, CWS becomes the engaged practice of CEWS in which students invest a significant amount of time and effort over an extended period of time, students engage with diverse people and places, co-educators as supervisors give frequent and timely feedback, and students engage in periodic, structured opportunities for critical reflection and learning (Kuh, O'Donnell, & Reed, 2013).

CEWS is just one opportunity for increasing access to HIPs. In considering the possibilities for its engaged design, CEWS has the potential to become a model for examining other HIPs (and especially community-engaged HIPs) from an equity-lens and applying elements that may increase their accessibility for full participation by all.

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