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UCLA Receives Grant to Support Long-term Study of Service Learning

The Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies has received a \$798,000 grant from Atlantic Philanthropies (USA) Inc. to study how service learning affects students after they finish college, and to assess the role of college faculty in service learning. The three-year study extends research the institute has conducted since the early 1990s.

"Service learning" is linking academic-learning objectives and community-service objectives through reflection activities that benefit the community and enhance student learning.

The goals of the new study include deepening understanding of how service learning affects students' sense of civic responsibility, civic engagement, and educational and career development in the years after college; how students from different cultural backgrounds experience service learning and define civic engagement; and faculty perspectives on service learning.

The new student study examines the post-college impact of participating in service learning during the undergraduate years by surveying 19,000 adults who entered college as freshmen in 1994.

Previous Higher Education Research Institute research has documented the positive relationship between service learning during the college years and a number of academic and civic engagement outcomes, including critical thinking, commitment to activism and plans to participate in service activities after college.

This new study explores whether the short-term benefits of participation in service-learning courses during college persist into the post-college years. The study also explores the relationship between service learning and post-college educational and career choices of participants.

In order to explore the effect of service learning on civic engagement in more depth, institute researchers will also conduct focus groups with students who have participated in service learning. This interview study will deepen understanding of the complex ways in which students might be affected by service learning, and will seek to better comprehend the issues for those students who may not find their service-learning experiences meaningful. This part of the study will also enrich understanding of how students think about civic engagement.

The attitudes and behaviors of faculty towards service learning are critical to its integration into the curriculum. By most estimates, the number of faculty teaching service-learning courses on college campuses is increasing, but there are almost no data on national trends. The faculty study will survey college and university faculty members across the nation in order to understand use of, and attitudes toward, service-

learning pedagogies. In order to track trends, results from this survey will be compared with findings from a faculty survey conducted by the institute in 1995.

Theodore L. Hullar, director of Atlantic Philanthropies' Higher Education Program said, "Atlantic Philanthropies is pleased to support this significant addition to understanding service learning, for the 'lessons learned' should significantly help increase further the strength and value of service learning, already one of the major contemporary innovations in higher education."

The principal investigator for the study is Alexander W. Astin, director of the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. Lori J. Vogelgesang, director of the Center for Service Learning Research and Dissemination at the institute, will be the study's project director.

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