

## Making College “Worth It” – Season 2, Episode 6

### The Impact of Service Learning

Ellie MacMillan (00:05):

Have you ever wanted to break out of your college's community bubble or participated in community service events? Well, you have come to the right place where we are finding the perfect mixture of community service and classroom learning to create community-based learning. Welcome to Making College Worth It, the show that examines engaged learning activities that increase the value of college experience. In each episode, we share research from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning and our international Network of scholars. We explore engaged learning activities that recent college graduates associate with their financial and time commitment to college being worthwhile. I'm Ellie MacMillan and I'm the Graduate Apprentice for the Center for Leadership. And today's episode will focus on community-based learning as a high impact practice. We'll hear interviews from Bob Frigo and Philip Motley, as well as a discussion on how community-based learning interacts with colleges and universities.

(01:10):

Service learning or community-based learning is defined by authors, Jury and Lawler as experimental pedagogy that combines learning through action, structured engagement with community partners and reflection to facilitate deep learning and increase skill transfer. You might hear us using service learning and community-based learning interchangeably, and I want to assure you that they mean the same thing. The shift to community-based learning is grounded in the idea that it is a mutually beneficial relationship, and we are active participants in community work. Students find these opportunities through volunteering service and engagement with community partners with a classroom element embedded. In April of 2024, Elon University Center for Engaged Learning conducted an online survey of US residents who were 18 to 34 years old and graduates of two or four year higher education institutions. 27.3 of these recent graduates had participated in a service learning or community engaged learning course during college.

(02:18):

Recent graduates who participated in service learning or community engaged learning were also significantly more likely to identify college experience as very rewarding. A key part of service learning courses is reflection, which helps students connect a broader understanding. Research done in 2022 has found that service learning can increase confidence in our college students stepping into the real world. Switching gears, we are going to be hearing from two of our classmates and two experts from higher education who have experience doing service learning. First, we are going to hear from Cassidy who will be interviewing Bob Frigo, who is the assistant Dean of campus life and director of the AL Center for Civic Life. And second, we have Carolina interviewing Philip Motley Jr. The faculty Fellow of Community-Based Learning. After both interviews, my fellow classmates and I will be discussing some of the common themes of what we found interesting in the interviews. Now we will be hearing from Cassidy Puckett and Bob Frigo.

Kassidy Puckett (03:21):

Alright, so just to start again, my name is Cassidy Puckett. I am an alumni of Elon. So I graduated in 2024, current student in the master's of Higher ed, and I'm working right now as a graduate apprentice in admissions. So I'm working with undergrad admissions.

Bob Frigo (03:40):

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Thanks for having me out today, Kassidy. My name is Bob Frigo and I am the assistant Dean of Campus life and the director of the AL Center for Civic Life. And really a lot of what the AL Center does is help connect the campus and the community and help connect students and faculty and staff with community partners and stakeholders and leaders to look at opportunities for how our students can have experiential learning opportunities and how we can work in collaboration with nonprofits and local schools and government agencies and local businesses to create reciprocal and collaborative opportunities for learning and for growth and for strengthening local communities.

Kassidy Puckett (04:17):

Yeah, awesome.

Bob Frigo (04:18):

So my role involves helping provide leadership for a team of six of us that does this work on campus.

Kassidy Puckett (04:24):

Awesome. So throughout this I'll probably switch back and forth between service learning and community-based learning just because

Bob Frigo (04:31):

Oh, yeah, no, and we just made the change a couple years ago, so we're only about two years into the language change.

Kassidy Puckett (04:38):

So I'll probably use a little bit of both because some of the research uses one.

Bob Frigo (04:43):

Yeah.

Kassidy Puckett (04:43):

So first question, from your perspective, what are the critical components of a successful community-based learning program?

Bob Frigo (04:51):

Sure, great question. I will tell you that Elon has worked long and hard on defining what we used to call academic service learning that we now call community-based learning. And there are four main tenets of community-based learning happening here at Elon, taken from the best practices in the field. Number one is that engagements and projects and activities are devoted to something broader to advancing the public good or the common good. So the public good idea of the common good is our number one. Number two, that interactions and connections between students in the community require preparation. And so there's a preparation piece that before students and colleagues go out in the community, we are preparing for that experience, for that endeavor to understand what we're doing,

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who we're doing it with, and what are some of the challenges. And to understand the context of what we're doing.

(05:41):

The preparation is number two. Number three, very important is that there's reciprocal benefit, that there is equal benefit between the university and with the community. We want to prevent the university from extracting data, information, resources and having the community not benefit from the experience. And so the idea is being reciprocal in the relationship. And then number four, our last TE is that there is reflection built into the experience. And so what happens is that when there is reflection added to experience and making meaning, that is when learning can take place. So those are the four main tenets.

Kassidy Puckett (06:18):

Awesome. That's really aligning with a lot of the research that we're doing and all the stuff we're talking about in class. So that sounds awesome.

Bob Frigo (06:24):

Good. And we talk about an old school pair model you may have encountered it's preparation, action, reflection, and evaluation. So that's been in our field for a long time, and so those components are really key to make this work successful.

Kassidy Puckett (06:38):

Yeah. Awesome. So next question is based on your experience or your understanding, how does service learning experiences influence a student's civic engagement and professional growth after graduation? So any stories you may have, A lot of what we're interested in is how these positive effects of this experience can go with you after you graduate.

Bob Frigo (07:00):

Great question and great time to ask and I'll tell you why in a second. But I will tell you, if you're thinking about your PhD down the road right now, there is a lack of longitudinal evidence for the impact of this work is people go on well after they leave their universities. And so there's a lot of opportunity there, but I'll tell you why it's timely. I'm teaching a J term class right now. It's a one credit class to help prepare students for careers in nonprofits and government. And so over the course of the class, the student's favorite thing to do is when I bring in young Elon alumni either in person or on Zoom to talk about how they got started, how they were influenced to do the work they're doing right now. And so in the last two weeks I've had a chance to talk to a number of alumni.

(07:43):

A lot of them have gotten their roots as student leaders here in the chron center. And so I got to ask that question. And so there is no coincidence that those students from sort of folks who graduated 10 years ago to somebody who graduated two years, actually just last year for that matter, people ultimately are where they are right now because of something that was sparked in their time engaging with the community. So I had one student, Rachel, she started out in the service learning community, which is the oldest LLC here on campus. Rachel was a participant. She went to lead it. She became a student

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leader in the AL Center. She was an AmeriCorps Vista in her time after she graduated and then went on to work for a local nonprofit in two national nonprofits in dc. So it all got started, very grassroots level.

(08:29):

Talked to another student, Mary Catherine. Mary Catherine used to do some work with Elon here on campus raising money for the Duke Children's Hospital. She also worked in our office connecting with Allied churches of Ance County, and she worked as a liaison there and she's now working for the Children's Miracle Network in their national office, helping students connect and support their broader mission. And so I have a lot of stories of alumni who basically did something to get started, and it's led to a variety of things. A really cool story I love to tell as well is that there was a student here that finished up about five years ago, Taylor Garner. And so Taylor started out as a volunteer in an afterschool program helping local refugee children with afterschool programs. And so Taylor went from volunteer to the coordinator of that program. And so she got really invested in refugees.

(09:20):

Taylor then started to work with Dr. Sandy Marshall to do some research on refugee populations and ended up doing some research in the Middle East. And then after she graduated, Taylor got a job with the United Nations in South America, focused on refugee populations there. And so going from volunteer to leadership to adding a research component. And so those stories for me are always amazing. But the alumni that I keep in touch with, I ask those questions about the impact. And for some students, they've changed their major. For some students, they've tweaked what they want to do after graduation. For some students, they've still gone on that path, but they've decided wherever they set up, and I have a couple that is in Dallas right now. They work in the oil industry, but they still do a lot of philanthropy and volunteer work and mentoring in their local community because the roots they had back here.

Kassidy Puckett (10:11):

Yeah, that's awesome. So you can definitely see that it's a meaningful experience for the students, which is awesome. Switching gears a little bit, so you've mentioned reflection already as one of the key components that your office tries to highlight. So a research study done by Hatcher, Ingle and Mathia in 2004. So a little bit dated stresses the importance of structured reflection. So how exactly do you go out guiding students in this reflection? I know you've mentioned it a little bit, but feel free to expand.

Bob Frigo (10:41):

Yeah, yep. Yeah, I know it's over a couple of decades old, but that has not changed by any means. I've gotten a chance to know and work a little bit with Dr. Hatcher and Dr. Bingle over the years, and so you've got some great heavy hitters. What we do in reflection is key. And so because of the operation we run, one of the things that we really invest in is helping train the trainers. And I'm going to give you two main frameworks here in the curricular setting. We have about 80 academic classes every year here at Elon that are working with local nonprofits, local schools, government agencies, local businesses, and so the faculty that teach those classes, what we have done is construct this scaffolded model of faculty development to help build in these best practices such as reflection. And so if you're a faculty, anything from history to engineering to geography to physics, you can take a three hour one-off workshop essentials of community-based learning.

(11:39):

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It's CBL 1 0 1 designed to dip your toe in the water. And so we start to build in the importance of reflection in that space. You can be involved in a semester long or year long community practice where we have faculty that are thinking about doing specific work in English 1100 doing CBL and stem. And so we build it into those conversations and readings and discussions. We have a really great one year program where faculty meet once a month and they opt in to the Community-Based Learning Scholars program where our faculty fellow for community-based learning, we'll work with those folks over the course of one year. We use Barbara Jacoby's book Service Learning Essentials. And so the fellow will walk those faculty through various facets that we talked about on this conversation today, reflection being one of 'em. And then we have faculty fellows and folks in my office that will then work with faculty as they develop individual courses as well.

(12:36):

And so we will give them resources and assistance in helping creating reflection opportunities. So we train the professors and train the trainers in reflection as we think about curricular and then the co-curricular, so about 82% of Elon students in the last graduating class participated in service before they graduated from Elon. And so some of those students, about half of those students will do it in the curricular setting. About half of them, our data shows will do it in the co-curricular setting outside of class. So we have over a hundred student leaders in Elon Volunteers, which is our student run co-curricular community-based operation. And so what we have built over the last seven or eight years is a monthly institute for community and civic engagement. And so what happens is that I have a student executive director that puts together a one hour program per month that we run three times in the fall, three times in the spring, and it's designed to train the trainers of all of our Elon student leaders who are working in community-based settings.

(13:36):

And these are our students who are helping coordinate Campus Kitchen and Habitat Free Humanity and the Boys and Girls Club and all these Special Olympics programs. And so we train those student leaders to help administer reflection to the volunteers on the respective volunteer sites. And so in those one hour per month sessions, we used to only do it one time per semester, and then we added it once per month. We continually teach students how to use and facilitate reflection because the more you practice, the more proficient you get. And we continually in those sessions use different best practices in models that students can then replicate in their respective spaces when they're working with students on an alternative break or after volunteering at Campus Kitchen. So those are some of the ways that we infuse reflection with all those individuals who are out with student volunteers on a regular basis. One of the things that's relatively newer for us is that we partner with the SPDC and we host summer internship opportunities for students with local organizations. And so we'll have two students at sustainable elements this summer as part of campus Alamance. And one of my students I met in her first year just got that offer. And so Izzy's really excited for that opportunity to work with them. So yeah, I agree. They're an amazing organization.

Kassidy Puckett (14:48):

Switching gears back to our research, so a study done in 2008 discusses how when done correctly service learning or community-based learning can support students in their commitment to our understanding of social justice. How do you think we can design service learning programs to focus on

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social justice and create deeper, more sustained engagement with community issues? I know that's very loaded.

Bob Frigo (15:12):

No, no, no. And I know that you referenced that was a study by Tania Mitchell, and so I just got a chance to hear her speak at a conference in San Diego. It was an international service learning conference this past fall. So she is a leading mind in the field, and I'll tell you exactly how we do it. If you take a look on the county level, the last three Alamance County community health assessments based on data that's come from the community, they've identified the same three community priorities and challenges. The last three assessments, it's education, it's economic issues, and it's health and wellness and access to healthcare and education. So one of the things that we do in this work is that we never go in and say, this is what your community needs. What we always do is we ask what does the community need?

(16:00):

What are the challenges and how can we work with and not for? And so given those three community challenge areas that have been lifted up in the last three health assessments, there is no coincidence that if you look at the framework for Elon volunteers, I mean over a hundred student or a hundred student leaders with these organizations, our framework behind EV is the Alamance County three priorities. It's education, economic issues, and health and wellness. And so in our conversations with students is students are helping build houses with habitat. If students are helping prepare meals with Campus Kitchen, as students are mentoring local youth with the Boys and Girls Club, at the end of the day we're asking, why do these organizations exist? Why are they here, and what are the social issues that they are addressing and what are the root causes of those social issues? So we're always looking at the why behind what we're doing. And in addition to those local three community framework challenges, the Monthly Institute for Community and Civic Engagement that we do for our student leaders, the framework for that is we use the 17 United Nations sustainable Development goals.

(17:10):

And so as we look on the broader issues that started with countries from around the world agreeing on these issues, then so they are international, they're national, they're state, they're local. Those 17 areas such as quality education, good health and wellbeing, zero hunger. What we do is we will bring in community leaders who are dealing with these challenges and issues on the ground, talking about how their organizations are helping address those issues and having students understand the connection between the local and the global and work towards the idea of justice and the work that they're doing as volunteers or students doing research or doing CBL work in their classes. And so we're always looking at what are the broader challenges and issues, but then what are the root causes of those issues? And so ultimately the work that we do is designed to help create stronger communities and then ultimately help create a more just society. So that framework is always in the forefront for us.

Kassidy Puckett (18:10):

Yeah, awesome. I think that's a really great way to frame things because students need a little, sometimes they need to take a step back and realize, oh, there's a little more going on as to why this has to exist in the first place.

Bob Frigo (18:22):

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We're letting students know about not just these challenges, but what are innovative solutions that are being put forward from a local to a global level to help address those challenges. And so students are learning about that from really their first semester with us.

Kassidy Puckett (18:35):

And then just kind of to close us out, are there any challenges or misconceptions about community-based learning that you feel like need to be addressed in higher education?

Bob Frigo (18:46):

I know there's

Kassidy Puckett (18:46):

Probably a lot you can think of. So,

Bob Frigo (18:48):

Yep. And I'll put a couple out there. I think when there is a lack of reciprocity, that is a primary concern. There are many stories over the decades of universities going into a community, extracting information, extracting data, using communities as laboratories and not reciprocating. And so those communities don't benefit from all that labor and all the contributions that they make. And so not being reciprocal in this work on the side of universities is a challenge. And so we continue to address that. And so I think on a broader scale, there is a book that's been out for quite some time called *Bowling Alone*. And so Robert Putnam at Harvard has talked about the decline of civic engagement and community engagement and human interaction in the US over the last 50 or 60 years. And so as we see fewer and fewer people engaging in volunteer work, fewer and fewer people and families having dinner together, fewer people engaging with others, ultimately that is coming into these spaces where students sometimes are more concerned about me as opposed to we.

(19:58):

And on a zoomed out scale, I think right now we're in the middle of a conversation, a national conversation about the value of higher education. Why should someone go to college? In terms, there are a lot of careers and opportunities in tech and other industries where you don't have to have that degree. I think we're seeing about what is the value of higher education to states and to societies? Are they just extracting public funds? And so for me, I think community-based learning and the teaching and the research and the work that we're doing, experiential learning, if we could start to turn our universities outward versus inward, the research that we do, the teaching that we do, the experiential learning that takes place, if there could be mutual benefit between universities and communities to help strengthen communities, to help strengthen states and regions and in countries, if that research can be harnessed for the public good, I think that's when we start to change the game.

(20:57):

And so for me, all that fits back into challenges, but also how community-based learning can help address some of these broader issues. And I'll be honest with you, I started out in student activities. I worked with an honors program. I worked at the Center for British American Studies. I've done a lot of different university facets for me, when I started working in this area, I found a different level of passion

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because the work that we do has huge impact and potential for huge impact. And sometimes you've got to do a little zigzagging before you find out where your niche is.

Ellie MacMillan (21:28):

Thank you, Cassidy and Bob for that insightful conversation. Now we are going to switch over to Carolina and Philip to hear more from the faculty side of community-based learning.

Carolina Martinez-Cuin (21:39):

All right. So just to start us off again, my name is Carolina Martinez. I'm an Elon alum class of 2024. I'm now a first year MHE student here at Elon, and I am the graduate apprentice for the Mosley Center.

Phillip Motley (21:52):

Okay. Hi, I'm Phillip Motley. I'm a professor in the communication design department in the school of Communications. I'm also in my fifth year as the faculty fellow for community-based learning, my fifth and final year. And I am also recently the School of Communications Director of Graduate programs.

Carolina Martinez-Cuin (22:13):

Alright, so jumping into our first question, service learning or community-based learning has been associated with higher retention rates amongst first year college students. So what do you believe are some of the contributing factors for this and what recommendations would you have for an institution to uphold those retention rates?

Phillip Motley (22:32):

I think the significance of community-based learning of service learning is that it authentically, it makes it clear or clearer to students why they're studying the thing that they're studying, whatever that is. Because it roots the academic aspects that can sometimes be abstract or they're in the box of the classroom in that sense and attaches it to the real world. So regardless of major or discipline, community engagement can help students see that what they're learning actually has meaning in the real world, which if you've graduated, maybe that's clearer to you, but if you haven't yet, sometimes that's still abstract.

(23:19):

So there's sort of the rubber to the road sort of way of thinking that it attaches clearly, tangibly that what you're learning in a certain discipline can be applied in the real world, real world. I think that's useful for all students regardless of type. And then in terms of the retention part, the easy but not so easy, easier said than done, answer is more service learning or more service learning is not the only thing. Like internships are similarly valuable. They help students understand why or how what they're learning functions professionally. I mean that's really the value of an internship program or other mechanisms like co-op programs. So it's not that service learning is uniquely qualified to do that, but service learning is one of those many experiential learning pedagogies or practices that let students figure out that, yeah, this thing I'm studying actually means X or Y after I graduate. Which again, I think sometimes as students are young, they have yet to lock in why or what that academic thing means.

Carolina Martinez-Cuin (24:33):

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Yeah. If I'm not mistaken, Elon has a program where first year students get to participate in service learning the summer before they come in.

Phillip Motley (24:43):

They do. Or they also have things like, my daughter is an Eon student now, she's a junior. The living learning communities, there's one focused on service and service learning. So there are multiple ways early on or to your point, even before you arrive, to experience community engagement.

Carolina Martinez-Cuin (25:04):

And based on your experience, how does service learning contribute to students' academic engagement and social integration within their institution?

Phillip Motley (25:12):

Well, so the academic one I think is very similar to what I said is it just makes it clear. It just makes it crystallize that you're studying this for a reason. Again, it takes away the abstract part or it can, in terms of integration, we just use Elon as an example. There's a lot of students at Elon that are not from North Carolina or not from Central North Carolina that without some mechanism or prompting may not venture very far into the Alamance County community or Burlington and experience what this place really is. It can be like Elon, but it's also a very diverse community that has, there's a lot more going on in a variety of ways. And so community engagement service learning allows students to experience communities they probably wouldn't otherwise.

Carolina Martinez-Cuin (25:59):

A study conducted by Robert Bingle suggested that service learning courses foster higher levels of academic engagement, faculty interaction in course satisfaction compared to traditional course. What are some specific strategies that you practice in your classroom to achieve these outcomes?

Phillip Motley (26:15):

Well, the reason that I love service learning because honestly for all involved, it's harder in the sense that it's more complex. If all I do is teach students in the classroom, provided here at the university, I walk in and teach my class, I go back to my office, I do whatever that a b is, I do that. Plus I figure out ways for students to be in the community, which means I got to do more work to make those relationships figure out even the simple things like how we're all going to get there because not everybody has a car or whatever. So it is messier and more complicated. The flip side, is there only one? This is my 15th year at Elon. I've only had one experience at Elon where students stop thinking about the grade as the most important thing and it's service learning. And it happens almost every time that students at some point switch from the grade to the community partner as being the most important outcome of the class and say things like, well, my grade's not as important as the community that we're working with their needs. I mean, essentially what they're saying is their needs are more important. It's like,

Kassidy Puckett (27:23):

Wow,

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Phillip Motley (27:24):

That never ever happens in other concepts. For me,

Kassidy Puckett (27:27):

In

Phillip Motley (27:28):

My teaching experience, that's never happened in another class that I've taught. I mean, not that every student is completely focused on grades, but that is the primary thing that students worry about. But almost always in service learning sooner or later that goes into the background. If you give students opportunities to work with community partners, especially community partners that have defined and clear needs that they can understand and see for themselves, it's not just me telling them that they experience that on their own. The rest almost takes care of itself.

Carolina Martinez-Cuin (27:54):

It really puts into perspective for the students. And I mean, I did a service learning class my senior year, and I think it really put into perspective, I guess the Elon bubble as we say here on campus and the greater Alamance community and their needs and how we were able to support them. I was at an elementary school, so helping them, I was at a school that was a title one school and had a lot of students who I identified with their identities as well. So helping, it made me just thankful that I was able to help them because when I was in their shoes, I didn't really have anyone to help me. So just made me grateful for that. And yeah, the grade was the least of my worries.

Phillip Motley (28:47):

The only time I've ever traveled abroad or anywhere where students or myself for that matter got to meet the people that live in that community abroad beyond transactional, I ordered a coffee, was through the service learning experience because you actually worked in partnership with people for multiple days. You get to know who they are. Things pop up or experiences happen that A, we didn't plan for or know that we're going to happen or B, a month later, that's what most people are talking about. They're not talking about the beach. And Costa Rica is beautiful. Yeah, it's beautiful. But in a year later they're like, remember when we went and ate at so-and-so's mom's in her house and she made us all a traditional Costa Rican breakfast? Yes. Hard to manufacture that too without some, not that you can't get it outside of being a college student, you can, but if you go to Puerto Rico for a vacation, you're probably going to be on the beach and go order a coffee or whatever and not have that deeper chance to connect and understand people. And what's life in this place? What's your life? What's your community?

Carolina Martinez-Cuin (29:54):

And how can educators design service, learning experiences that balance academic rigor with meaningful engagement and also fostering self-efficacy in students,

Phillip Motley (30:06):

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Not to go get all academic or the literature, but you brought up Bingle. There's a lot of literature on service learning that says that the ideal service learning is a careful balance of both service and the learning. And if you're not mindful of that, it can be a whole lot about the academic stuff in a teeny, tiny bit of service, and it's sort of soft on that side. Then it can also be very, very, very focused on the service. And it sort of leans almost into volunteerism because it's very light on the learning. So there is the need to carefully balance how as a business student might you work in the community to learn about economics or whatever. How might you as a communication student work in a community setting where you can practice those skills that you're supposed to be learning or that knowledge that you're supposed to be getting while you're providing the service.

(30:56):

So from a professor or a teacher standpoint, there is something to be said for that being. You need to be deliberate or attentive to the needs of both. And it can be done, but it's shouldn't be taken for granted that it will just happen. Because if, I don't know, pick the discipline. If you're trying to teach students some subject, you could teach them in the classroom through, I could just sit up there and talk the whole time and lecture and everybody would go to sleep and be bored. We could do, I teach graphic design. I'm very, very good at making up fake projects. Fake organization needs a logo design or whatever. Or we could go find an organization in the community that actually might need a logo or some other thing designed for them that allows students to practice those skills. It also allows them to practice the, like I tell students a lot of times in my class, I'm the easiest client you'll ever have.

(31:52):

I just gave you an assignment sheet and a rubric that tells you how to get a good grade. Your client's not going to give you a rubric that tells you when you get an A on the logo. That's not real world, the real world, they're going to keep going, but we like it, but can you change it? But we like this other color red better than your color red. But so when there's a service learning experience to say, make a logo for a community or a company or organization in the community, they get the chance to deal with that messiness. And oh, by the way, they can't be mad at me for changing the project all the time because the client did.

(32:27):

But that's real world stuff. Nothing is as simple. Everybody, when you're a college student, oh, the project or the assignment is so hard, why is it hard? Oh, it's all this complex. It's like, okay, but when you do it for real and your job at whatever you're doing, it's probably going to be five times more complex. Your boss isn't going to be happy with it, and then the client's not going to be happy with it, and then the boss's boss is not going to be happy. So they get a chance to have that sort of mess. The same in internship, you get to see the complexity of the what's it like really to do finance in the world. You apply the things you learned probably, but it's also, there's all kinds of other things going on. Coworkers, your boss, the company's clients or their goals, you know what I mean? So those experiential things like service learning give you a chance to test the water, so to speak.

Carolina Martinez-Cuin (33:15):

And for our last question, what emerging trends or innovations do you believe are shaping the future of service learning?

Phillip Motley (33:22):

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Wow, that's a good question. I don't know the answer for sure, but I would say this about Elon because I think Elon could do this very quickly. Elon does a few things. I mean, we do a lot of stuff. Well, this is a great place, but academically we do a few things. Well, one, we're really well known for study abroad and international education, global education. We are, we're also really well known for service learning and community engagement. What we don't do enough of, but we could super easily is what I had a chance to do in the immediate grad program, which is smash those two things together and do more international or global service learning where students do a winter term study abroad, wherever, and there's a meaningful service learning component attached to it. We already know how to do them both separately super well.

(34:11):

All we got to do is put 'em in a box and smash 'em together. And I think that's happening slowly. I hope it'll catch fire and really take off. So for example, Vanessa Drew Branch is a professor in the human service studies. She's got a group of students right now in Barbados for winter term, and it has a service like it's been approved as a service learning course as well. So it's both a designated service learning course, it's a dedicated study abroad course. As an Elon student, you got to have two ELRs. The biggest problem there is like which ELR do they

Kassidy Puckett (34:42):

Get?

Phillip Motley (34:44):

And then as far as I'm concerned, it's like who cares? They're there doing that magical thing called global service learning. So they're going to a go be in Barbados, it'll be beautiful. They'll have the culture of Barbados and they're going to work with the community partner for three weeks, and they're going to end up meeting people there in a way that they wouldn't have otherwise. So that's exciting. I mean, that's not an innovation, that's not a new thing that already exists. But I think there's opportunities at places like Elon, especially Elon, because we have January term

(35:12):

And we do a lot of short term faculty led study abroad experience and study USA for that matter too. You could do this in Arizona or you could do this in wherever where there, there's clearly a service learning component as well. So now you get to be in Arizona like Dr. Marshall in the history and geography does a borderlands course in Arizona and New Mexico studying immigration, add a service learning component to that. I'd love to see more of that happen because I just think that makes, that would stand out in your four years at an institution like Elon as the Hallmark best class you took.

Carolina Martinez-Cuin (35:49):

Yeah. Plus it creates a bonding opportunity for the students are in that class.

Phillip Motley (35:54):

Oh, for sure.

Ellie MacMillan (35:55):

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### The Impact of Service Learning

Thank you Carolina and Philip for that lovely conversation about the faculty work that is involved in community-based learning. So again, my name is Ellie and I have my two classmates here. And we're kind of going to talk about what we heard and the research behind it and some of what we can take away. So can I have you both introduce yourselves?

Carolina Martinez-Cuin (36:22):

I'm Carolina, and like I mentioned before, I am the graduate apprentice for the Mosley Center and Elon alum from the class of 2024. And I am a first year in the Master's of Higher education program.

Kassidy Puckett (36:36):

Alright. And I'm Kassidy. I'm also a fellow 2024 grad of Elon and a first year in the master's of higher ed, and I'm doing an apprenticeship with the Office of Undergraduate Admissions.

Ellie MacMillan (36:50):

Awesome. And yes, I'm also in the Master's of Higher Education program. So big shout out to the MAT program for getting us all together. So I just kind of want to go down through and talk about what we heard and what our key takeaways were. And I really like how both Bob and Philip mentioned the importance of having a mutually beneficial relationship. You can't just walk into communities and kind of expect, do the work and then leave. Philip was even talking about how people gather data, extract data from these communities and then just up and leave and it kind of leaves such a strain on the relationship. And I want to say Elon does a good job with having positive relationships with the community. But Carolina, do you have any thoughts about that?

Carolina Martinez-Cuin (37:56):

Yeah, I mean, it was one of the points for me when I heard Kassidy and Bob's interview that I didn't know Elon was so intentional about having that reciprocity within the community because you have to really think about the impact that you're having on the community after you do your service. For example, in my service learning course, I was at an elementary school, I was working with fifth graders, I believe. And one of the things that I thought about from day one was, what's going to happen to these kids when I leave at the end of the semester? They're just going to remember me as, oh, the girl that came into our class and helped us for an hour or two, and what happens to them after that? The impact of just leaving after working with them for so long. You just have to think about that.

Ellie MacMillan (38:56):

Yeah, and I think what's so kind of important with that, that Philip kind of mentioned was how the grade at the end of the day really doesn't matter as much as the relationships that you build, having those kids be there and having built relationships. I am sure you weren't thinking of the grade at the top of your mind, you were more thinking about the connections than the people that you've made. Kassidy, do you want to share some of your service learning experience?

Kassidy Puckett (39:33):

Yeah, of course. So I did service learning, actually integrated with another high impact practice, so it was part of my capstone course and I worked with a nonprofit in Allan County that works on rehabilitating

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people and putting them back into the community, helping them find work. So it was a really cool experience and it was an organization I hadn't heard of before having to go out into the community because of a service learning course. And something I talked about with Bob is now I feel like out shouting the praises of that organization to anyone that will listen because I think it's a really cool space. But I also often thought about, we were doing a lot of really research based work for them and helping them market themselves to the community and fundraising stuff. And if there's not a classroom that has students that are interested in that next year, that could really hurt their business model as far as trying to fundraise if they don't have the students and the extra people there to put in the work because they're only, at that time there were two employees of this entire organization. So I think it's really cool that Elon is constantly working to make sure that these organizations that they're partnering with, even if it's a cycle of students who can't work there their whole four years, they're still constantly being helped out by the university. So we didn't just leave them in the dust once our semester was over.

Ellie MacMillan (41:09):

Yeah, that's awesome. And now that we're kind of all in our post-grad lives, which is kind of crazy to think about, I want to ask you both how you see this kind of helping your career and how you both see the experiences of community-based learning kind of elevate your careers. So I know both specifically Bob shared a lot of different stories about how a lot of nonprofit leaders kind of started in the Knodel Center, which is such a cool opportunity, but how do you guys see volunteering show up in your post-grad lives? So Cassidy, can we hear from you?

Kassidy Puckett (42:01):

Yeah, of course. So I think something that's cool is a lot of, because I'm still in the Elon bubble, I don't have to quite look for opportunities as much because even as staff we're constantly being presented with opportunities to give back to the community. But I think just it kind of built a culture. I'm used to a culture of giving back, which is really nice. And I think that's something that no matter where I go post grad, I want to bring that with me. And I've developed, one of my favorite things to do with my friends is find ways to give back to the community. And it's become almost, this sounds like the wrong word, but hobby of mine. It's something I like to do in my free time. So I think had it not been part of a course for me where I got the chance to really think about the impact I was having, I wouldn't have grown such a strong attachment to serving the community.

Ellie MacMillan (42:56):

And I know for me, I once worked in, I did an internship at a bank at community bank back in my hometown, and they were very involved in the community. And in fact, employees could do kind of community service with different organizations like throughout the year and count it as hours that they worked at the bank. So they're still kind of getting an incentive, but a lot of times entire departments will go and volunteer together. And I think that's a great way of making sure that this work still shows up in your postgrad life. So wanted to hear from Cassidy of how you view the messiness of this real world experience that Philip was kind of talking about.

Kassidy Puckett (43:57):

So I think that doing community-based learning and actually getting into communities that aren't the so supervised and constructed bubble that you're in, the classroom setting can be really overwhelming for

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students because it's messy and things are going to happen that you have zero control over, which isn't that common in a traditional classroom. So say that it rains out the event you are supposed to be helping with, or someone who you are relying on to do a part of a project in the community isn't following through because they have other commitments. Things like that can really prepare students for problem solving in a way that they can't always get in the classroom because they're kind of kept under the guide of the professor at all times and the environment is very curated. So I think that that's really something that's beneficial for students because they are experiencing the real world, but they have their professor's guidance when needed. And that's I think one of the most important parts of a successful community-based learning course is knowing that when problems arise, the professor is there more to offer guidance than to tell you what to do or hold your hand through the process, but just help you figure out solutions when problems come up.

Ellie MacMillan (45:25):

Yeah. Well, I've really been such a fantastic conversation, which is the three of us of some major takeaways, but I wanted to ask you both, what are some of your, after doing this whole project, all the research we put into this, what are your kind of major takeaways on community-based learning and how we can take this into consideration as we entered the world of higher education? So Carolina, can I hear from you?

Carolina Martinez-Cuin (45:57):

Yeah. I think one of the major takeaways for me was something that Philip said about grading, how in every course students care about the grade because that's what is going to keep them enrolled in school and maybe help them keep their scholarships. But in courses like the students at the end of the class, they don't care about the grade, they care more about the impact that they have on the community. And I think that really shows the growth that they have as a person and also as a student because they realize that there are bigger things in life that maybe have not impacted them directly, but are impacting members of their community and they were able to be a helping hand in a situation like that.

Kassidy Puckett (46:45):

Yeah, I think that as someone who was originally studying to be a teacher, a lot of my classes we talked about the power of reflection. And I just feel like that is such a powerful tool in these community-based learning courses that allow students to reach that point that Carolina mentioned, where they're more worried about the impact they're having as opposed to the grade. And I think that it was really cool what Bob was talking about, that he's preparing these teachers and professors with the skills to help their students reflect. And I think in my new found post-grad life, I'm really trying to use reflection more often to think about how important certain things I'm doing are, and not just living moment to moment, but taking time to think about it. And so I think that reflection is a skill that will stay with you and help you. So if you can learn it in a community-based learning course, there's so many positives there.

Ellie MacMillan (47:42):

Yeah. Awesome. And I think for me, I'm really kind of, I took an introduction to nonprofits course last year and I'm really seeing a lot of similarities between the work that I was doing last year and the key points that both Bob and Philip had and within our research. So the use of reflection, the UN sustainable development goals, the mutually beneficial relationship. So I think that's kind of what I'm taking away, is

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that it's just really important to keep communities together and working together and the college kind of environment can foster such growth, which within our students to kind of prepare them for the outside world and we can really facilitate that through community-based learning. Thank you both for being here and kind of reflecting on both of these interviews as we have learned today. Community-based learning is important to both students and the broader community to help connect students to the importance of volunteerism and emphasize reflection through the process. If your college is looking to get involved with community-based learning, the best models suggest the use of reflection, goal setting, and mutually beneficial relationships with community members. As we heard both experts emphasize the importance of mutually beneficial relationships and creating positive relationships, we hope all of our listeners get involved with community-based learning at your college or university while you have the opportunity to.

(49:34):

Once again, I'm Ellie Macmillan, the Graduate Apprentice for the Center for Leadership. Thank you for joining us for Making College Worth It from Elon University Center for Engaged Learning. To learn more about today's topic, see our show notes at [www.centerforengagedlearning.org](http://www.centerforengagedlearning.org).