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Service Learning Partnerships with Private Practice

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Service learning as a tool for landscape architecture education is prescriptive in its ability to develop moral as well as professional values (1)(2). Development of these values in the academic realm is important as we prepare future practitioners to enter into the professional world. Upon graduation they will be expected to adhere and advance the tenets of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) that outline personal and environmental values. Traditional delivery of service learning has been through the university as an academic endeavor that is embedded into a specific course, but alternative models exist that provide an opportunity to engage with private practice in its delivery to enhance overall outcomes and value development. A service learning internship organized and sponsored by a firm in partnership with the university can have positive implications for all the shareholders. The opportunities and constraints of this model are examined in a case study that encompasses three separate service-learning internships that have worked at AIDS orphanages in South Africa to design and construct food gardens and playgrounds.

Discernable benefits are identified for the students, university, sponsoring private firm, and the community for which the work is being done. Each of the internships provided students a chance to experience how the administration of the sponsoring firm works as it undertake the delivery of a project. They are able to see the significance of communication and conflict resolution skills as they influence the success and momentum of a project's completion. It provides a new set of professional role models that can influence their moral and professional development. The sponsoring firm benefits in its ability to observe potential future employees in real world experiences, and provides an opportunity to enhance their own community philanthropy. Their professional development is renewed with an opportunity to prioritize the tenets of ASLA in the work being completed. The university benefits from the student's involvement as it showcases their community outreach and engagement with global issues. The children of the AIDS orphanage benefit from new resources that have been built to enhance and improve their daily lives.

Additional benefits include a streamlining of service learning delivery to the students, and the ability to make difficult sites and marginalized clients more accessible. The partnership between universities and private practice for delivery of service learning should be strengthened with increased outreach to private firms for engagement and involvement.

--Associate Professor David Watts