



**Learning from Service:
Reflections on the work of the CSICC and
the University Service and Civic Engagement Task Force Report**

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My name is Jennifer Liu and I am a senior in the Woodrow Wilson School and a member of the Princeton Quadrangle Club. For the past two years, I have been a member of the Community Service Inter-Club Council (CSICC). This year, I am serving as one of the three co-chairs for TruckFest 2016.

For my senior thesis, I researched service-learning programs at colleges and universities with the goal of determining whether a larger service-learning program would be successful at Princeton. As part of my research, I read the recent Service and Civic Engagement task force report. While reading the task force report, I realized that the work of the CSICC is closely aligned with one of the central themes in the report: learning from service. Here I will present my reflections on how the work that the CSICC does is closely connected to the idea of service learning and the objectives stated in the task force report.

The task force report argues that, “at present [service and civic engagement] are not fully integrated into the core of the Princeton education.” More specifically, making a commitment to service and civic engagement has been difficult for many students who feel that the campus culture at Princeton doesn’t support this type of work. The task force report suggests that Princeton make a greater effort to incorporate service into all aspects of student life so that students can both learn about service and learn from service in many different contexts.

The eating clubs are a primary part of the undergraduate experience for over 70% of juniors and seniors. Therefore, I along with the other CSICC co-chairs believe that service should be a primary focus for the eating clubs, their memberships, and their officers. Our goal is to foster a culture of service within the Princeton eating clubs, so that service becomes a greater part of Princeton campus culture and the Princeton student experience.

The task force report defines a mechanism that we can use in order to establish service as a core value at Princeton, called the positive learning spiral. The report argues that “service and civic engagement at their best – in order to achieve their goals of responding to needs in the world and helping to make the world better – must involve learning.” The positive learning spiral has three objectives: learning why to serve, learning how to serve, and learning from service. I believe that the CSICC’s work meets each of these objectives.

At our meetings, the CSICC discusses why service is important, especially among the eating clubs. There are three dimensions to why the CSICC believes that service is important. First, our goal is to unify the eating clubs around shared causes. The goal of the CSICC is to increase collaboration and communication among members of the 11 eating clubs at Princeton as we work together to support local nonprofit organizations. Next, we want to develop a connection between the eating clubs and the Princeton Community, and there are several ways that we are doing this. For example, we have members from community organizations such as the YWCA, HiTops, and Big Sibs come speak with us at our meetings about the work that they are doing and the ways that Princeton students can get involved. Also, through events such as TruckFest, we tighten the connection between the University and the town; this event brings students and community members together all for one common cause. In addition, we recently formed the eating clubs community partner program, which pairs each eating club with a community organization and strengthens ties between eating club members and individuals from these local nonprofits. Finally, we want to teach our fellow undergraduate peers why it is important that they serve. This year at the first annual Trick-or-Feed, we publicized the importance of campus-wide collaboration by encouraging Princeton students to come together to support TASK through their purchase of a Trick-or-Feed sticker.

All CSICC members are also community service chairs of their respective eating clubs; it is their role to explain to their club memberships why they should be involved in service and help to provide service opportunities for their clubs.

As CSICC members, we learn how to form partnerships with community organizations and make a difference in the lives of others. I can definitively say that I have learned incredibly valuable skills as a member of the CSICC about how to engage in service. Through our experience organizing TruckFest, CSICC members have learned *how* to serve. For example, meaningful service knows the needs of the community, and we have learned how to identify a beneficiary for our service. For the past three years we have gone through the process of selecting a cause for Princeton TruckFest. This involves contacting local nonprofit organizations and asking them to apply to be a TruckFest cause. It involves visiting the nonprofits and speaking with them about how they will use the funds that they receive and forming a partnership with the organizations that can be sustained from year to year. We have also learned how to plan a large-scale service event. In planning TruckFest, this meant contacting trucks months in advance to set up contracts for the event. We had to work with sponsors to find the necessary support for our event, and plan financially so that we could make the most of our donations and generate the largest possible profits to support our cause. The planning process also involves a communications team, whose job it is to publicize the event, whether it be on social media, on posters, or by updating the TruckFest website. Preparing for TruckFest involves many logistical tasks as well, such as setting up tables and chairs, recruiting volunteers, and making sure things go smoothly on the day of. Finally, we have learned how to evaluate and improve our service. After TruckFest 2015, we created a final report that stated the ways in which we met our goals and the objectives that we achieved. We evaluated our successes and ways that we could improve, and set goals for TruckFest 2016. For example, we have sent contracts to 18 trucks to come to TruckFest this year,

and we estimate that this will increase our total number of trucks from 11 last year to at least 15 this year.

The last dimension of the learning spiral is learning from service. Lisa Schmucki, the GICC advisor, often tells us that the CSICC is like a mini business, and in many ways it is. In planning TruckFest, we have learned how to work with those who are different from us. We have collaborated with the University administration, town officials, other students, community partner members, and food truck owners, all of whom have very different backgrounds and perspectives. We have learned how to navigate relationships with different parties, and to bring everyone together for a common cause. We have also learned how to communicate, and I believe that our work on the CSICC has greatly improved our public speaking skills, communication skills, and interpersonal skills. We have learned how to pitch our event, request funding, and advocate for our cause. Finally, we have learned how to reflect. We have learned how to reflect on the work that we are doing, why it is important, and what it means to us. The task force report states, “to learn the most from serving, and to be able to give the most through doing so, is again not an automatic capacity. It too requires interplay between practice and reflection.”

In this way, I believe that the CSICC has taught me just as much if not more than I have learned in class at Princeton. The interaction between service and learning comes to life on the CSICC, and all of our members agree that our work is very important. We are enthusiastic about what we do, passionate about the causes that we support, and committed to fostering a culture in the eating clubs that continues to support service for years to come.