



SERVICE LEARNING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION

JASON EDWARDS, KAREN RAYMOND, SHARON O'BRIAN BROOKS | UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

BRIDGING SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES: LESSONS FROM AN AFTER SCHOOL SERVICE-LEARNING PROGRAM

ABSTRACT:

This study examined the impact of an after-school service-learning program on the relationship between a Research I university and a local school district. Participants included eight middle school students, three teachers, and one administrator. Data from interviews, field notes, and memos showed stakeholders viewed the university–district relationship positively but complicated with the city. Students valued academic support and mentoring, while staff highlighted strengthened university-school relations. Communication difficulties highlighted ongoing challenges in sustaining effective service-learning partnerships.

THEMATIC FOCUS:

Blockage and Clearance: Physical, infrastructural, financial, or organizational barriers or portals to community engagement.

Convergence and Intersections: How increasing or decreasing hyperconnectivity can impact community engagement.

BIO(S):

Dr. Jason Edwards is a public service faculty member at the J.W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development at the University of Georgia. He earned a doctorate in Educational Leadership, along with master's and bachelor's degrees in Health and Physical Education, from UGA. His doctoral research examined an after-school sports mentoring program he founded while teaching in UGA's Department of Kinesiology. The program's success led the UGA President to commit funds for expansion. In 2023, Edwards received the UGA President's Fulfilling the Dream Award for advancing Dr. King's vision of equality and justice.

Karen Raymond serves as the Community Partnerships Coordinator, where she leads the Coaching 4 Success program—an after-school sports and academic coaching initiative aimed at empowering elementary school children in the Clarke County School District. In this role, Karen coordinates UGA volunteers who mentor students, helping them develop vital social-emotional skills alongside their athletic pursuits.

Karen earned a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Georgia Southern University and a Master of Public Health with a focus on Epidemiology, along with a Global Health Certificate, from the University of Georgia. Her commitment to enhancing the health and wellbeing of children at this critical stage of their development fuels her passion for public health and her work with the Coaching 4 Success program. Prior to her current role, she contributed to addressing public health needs across Georgia as a graduate assistant with the Archway Partnership, another Public Service and Outreach unit at UGA.

Originally from Sri Lanka, Karen has always been deeply committed to public and community service. She is driven by a vision to expand the reach of the Coaching 4 Success program to more schools within the district and to demonstrate its measurable impact on student outcomes. In her free time, Karen enjoys reading, baking, and volunteering.

Shannon O'Brien Brooks (formerly Wilder) has served as the founding director of the Office of Service-Learning (OSL) at the University of Georgia since 2005 where she provides leadership, support and vision for enhancing UGA's service-learning initiatives and its community-campus engagement. She received her BFA from Baylor University in Waco, Texas. She holds a M.Ed. in instructional technology (2001) and a Ph.D. in art education (2006), both from the University of Georgia. Prior to leading the OSL, Shannon worked in UGA's Office of Instructional Support & Development (now the Center for Teaching and Learning) from 2000-2005, and in Cooperative Extension from 1995-2000.

Shannon serves as the editor for the Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement (JHEOE). Her research has been published in journals such as the International Journal of Education and the Arts and the International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement. In addition to her administrative duties, Shannon holds a courtesy faculty appointment in the Department of Art Education in the Lamar Dodd School of Art where she has developed and taught the graduate course Art Education in the Community as well as a First Year Odyssey service-learning course, 'Citizen Artists' and the Role of the Arts in Public Life. In addition, she has co-taught GRSC 78070S: Service-Learning Course Design.

Shannon was selected as a 2008-2009 Education Policy Fellow by the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. She also served as the 2009-2010 chair of the executive committee of the Gulf-South Summit on Service-Learning and Civic Engagement through Higher Education and was the recipient of this organization's 2011 Outstanding Service-Learning Practitioner Award. She has served on many university-wide committees such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Steering Committee, the Quality Enhancement Plan Committee for UGA's 2010 Southern Association of Colleges and Schools accreditation process, and co-chaired the working group for UGA's application for the 2010 Carnegie Community Engagement Classification.