

DEVELOPING A SERVICE-LEARNING COURSE

How Do Courses Become "Service-Learning"?

Traditional courses that become "service-learning" typically originate with one common idea: that students will derive more substantial benefits from the subject matter if they can connect it with personal experience and actual circumstances. From there, faculty redesign their syllabus, conceive of new writing assignments, and seek out opportunities for their students to get involved in the community. The function of the Service-Learning Task Force is to assist faculty in this process by providing resources and assisting with logistics such as site identification.

The SL Task Force is working to establish a Service Learning designation in the TSU catalog so faculty can have their service-learning courses officially designated as such. This enables students to become aware of what courses offer a service-learning component prior to the first class period. For a course to be designated as a service-learning course, it must meet basic criteria to be listed on the website. As such the designation process will function as a type of quality control, assuring students, other faculty, and administrators that certain components are included in the course.

Should the Service be Required or Optional?

The dilemma of whether a service experience should be a required or optional course component is one in which most service-learning practitioners have struggled. Some faculty believe that requiring service of all students may impose undue hardships upon some students who, for instance, may have to work full-time in order to attend college or have other obligations that constrain their availability of time. In cases where faculty offer service as an optional course component, integrating the service experience into the classroom experience may prove difficult. As such, an optional service requirement may lessen the extent to which an instructor refashions the classroom experience in order to accommodate reflection upon and discussion of the service experience. However, when the service is optional and students can select from among two or more constellations of course requirements faculty must be vigilant to ensure that the time and effort required of students as well as the potential learning outcomes from the various constellations are comparable. Different models for incorporating service-learning into a course are discussed later in this document.

Most faculty make the service experience a requirement of the course for all students. Making service required facilitates the integration of the service and the classroom experiences while enhancing all students' ability to learn from each other as well as from the service experience. In order to accommodate the varying schedules of students, faculty may decide to offer a menu of service experiences for students to select from.

Can I Cover the Same Content in Service-Learning Courses as in Traditional Courses?

One commonly asked question is "am I going to have to eliminate part of the course content to be able to include service in this class?" There are various strategies for incorporating a service requirement. Some faculty select the most essential content and assignments; eliminate some readings, papers, or lectures; and integrate a service experience to help the students more fully internalize the core content through personal experience. Some faculty conclude that service-

learning benefits do not outweigh sacrificing course content. Others find they can add the service component with little change in the course content. Still others "front load" the course to teach skills, concepts and perspectives early in the semester that will be used in doing the service. There are real and serious trade-offs involved here. Faculty with different personal and educational goals in divergent disciplines will arrive at different conclusions. It is unreasonable to assume that all courses benefit from this method of teaching and learning.

Does Service-Learning Change the Classroom Environment?

The incorporation of service-learning can change relationships within the classroom. As students gain knowledge and confidence from independent experiences, they bring more to the classroom and typically become more engaged in class discussions. If groups of students share a service assignment, they develop new relationships with each other, with members of the community, and perhaps with the instructor. If an entire class carries out a service project together, leadership in the classroom may become more dispersed. Faculty report an increased atmosphere of shared learning and a stronger sense of community among themselves and the students. Some faculty welcomes this increased student involvement and interaction. A few have found the change from a "teacher-centered" classroom personally uncomfortable.

L. Bonar, R. Buchanan, I. Fisher, and A. Wechsler. 1996. *Service-Learning in the Curriculum: A Faculty Guide to Course Development*. Salt Lake City, UT: Lowell Bennion Community Service Center at the University of Utah.

How Can I Build a Service-Learning Syllabus?

How clearly does your syllabus communicate the role of service-learning in achieving course goals and objectives? The first step in the process of integration is the discussion of service-learning within the context of goal selection. While goal selection is unique to each learning situation, there are some general principles that can be applied:

Principles of Effective Goal Selection

1. The selection of goals goes hand-in-hand with the selection of the service activities themselves. Select and structure service experiences and select goals for the experiences, which comport well with the academic goals for the course and which are achievable within the particular service setting available.
2. The objectives need to be explicit in showing students how to relate service experiences and academic course content. Without such direction, many students will not make the connection at all, some will see the connection vaguely, and only a few will see the connection clearly.
3. The goals and objectives need to be expressed simply and clearly. Use quantification whenever it helps clarity.
4. Goals and objectives need to be written so that the instructor as well as the student can tell when they have been achieved.
5. If an agency (or school) is involved in the service experience, it should be informed of the goals and objectives; if the agency (or school) wishes to be, it should be involved in goal and objective selection as well.

6. Goals and objectives need to be selected with consideration of the well-being of the service client as well as the student.

Examples of discipline specific syllabi are available on-line at many sites linked to the Service Learning web site on the TSU website under the link for faculty..

Bradle, James. (1995). A Model for Evaluating Student Learning in Academically Based Service, *Connecting Cognition and Action: Evaluation of Student Performance in Service-Learning Courses*, Campus Compacts Project on Integrating Service with Academic Study.

How is Student Learning from the Service Experience Facilitated?

Intentionally designed integrative activities, such as reflective and critical assessment exercises, are the key ingredients for transforming service experiences into learning. Each instructor will select and combine exercises and activities appropriate to the goals of the course and the students’ service experience. What follows is a brief description of the benefits and key components of reflective activities.

"(T)he academic payoffs of having students engage in community service are substantial when the service activity is integrated with traditional classroom instruction. The key word here is integrated. The kinds of service activities in which the students participate should be selected so that they illustrate, affirm, extend, and challenge material presented in readings and lectures. Time in class meetings should be set aside regularly for students to reflect upon and discuss what they are learning in the community. These recommendations are consistent with conclusions of others who have studied service-learning (e.g., Barber, 1992; Hedin, 1989; Station,1990)."

Markus, G.B., J.P.F. Howard, and D.C. King. (1993). *Integrating Service and Classroom Instruction Enhances Learning: Results from an Experiment. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis.* 15 (4): 410-419.

3 BASIC QUESTIONS OF REFLECTION	COMPONENTS OF REFLECTION
<p>1. WHAT?</p> <p>What will / are / have you been doing?</p>	ANALYSIS
<p>2. SO WHAT?</p> <p>What will / are / have you been learning?</p> <p>Why is your service work needed?</p>	CRITICAL THINKING
<p>3. NOW WHAT?</p> <p>What should you do about it?</p> <p>What are you going to do about it?</p>	DECISION MAKING

How are Students in Service-Learning Courses Graded?

The Service-Learning research discourages the granting of credit or grading for hours of service performed. A student would not expect to receive credit for reading a book or attending a lecture; rather, he or she would expect to have some assessment of the learning derived from these activities. A similar approach makes sense for performance of service.

Faculty can use a variety of reflective assessment tools and assignments (these are discussed in Appendices E and F, samples are also available from the Service Learning Center) to evaluate the learning students have gained through their service. While predetermined learning goals can help with assessment, valuable spontaneous learning can and will occur in a less-structured, non-classroom setting. Utilizing a method that allows students to process such experiences and articulate their learning will facilitate the grading process. Service-learning faculty typically assign a percentage of the grade to one or more assignments that enable students to assess this learning. For instance, some faculty use "Learner Outcome" worksheets for students to initially identify the specific learner outcomes they desire. At the completion of the service experience students then complete a "Learner Outcome Assessment" worksheet and complete a written assignment discussing the outcomes they desired, the extent to which the outcomes were achieved, and how the service experience related to the desired and realized outcomes.

Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning

- The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.
- Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated and revealed in performance over time.
- Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.
- Assessment requires attention to outcomes, but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.
- Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.
- Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.
- Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.
- Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.
- Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.

The American Association for Higher Education Assessment Forum, "Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning" (Washington, DC: AAHE, 1992)

Recommendations for Student Assessment

In order to ensure academic integrity, it is essential that service-learning be used in conjunction with rigorous evaluation. Assessment should be based on students' demonstration of how they are integrating the service experience to course content--not for service performed. The following recommendations are guidelines for how to conduct assessment of service-learners.

- An assignment or activity, such as a journal, is needed to provide evidence of how the student connects the service to the course content.
- By helping students to distinguish between description and analysis, between emotional reactions and cognitive observations, faculty help them to transform service experiences into learning experiences.
- Evaluation of service-learning occasionally makes use of subjective evaluation in the same way that traditional courses sometimes make use of subjective evaluation.
- There is not a one-to-one correspondence between hours served and knowledge gained or credit earned.
- Nevertheless, a certain minimum of service hours may be needed to provide an experience of significant depth.
- To preserve the academic integrity of service-learning, credit is not awarded for hours of service but rather for demonstrated learning based on service.
- Extra hours of service should not necessarily yield extra credit.
- Giving early and regular extended feedback on students' journal entries is a critical part of teaching students how to develop their reflection skills.

Troppe, Marie. (1995). Common Cases: Philosophy of Evaluation in Service-Learning Courses, *Connecting Cognition and Action: Evaluation of Student Performance in Service-Learning Courses*, Campus Compact's Project on Integrating Service With Academic Study.

Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning

The Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning is the product of a two year process by experienced practitioners to articulate what they learned and discovered to be the best practices for combining community service with student learning and development. Finalized in the spring of 1989 at the historic Wingspread Conference, hosted by the Johnson Foundation, the Principles represents the collaborative effort of more than seventy-five national and regional organizations committed to community service and experiential education. The Principles have since been regarded as the foundation for all effective service-learning programs by schools and campuses across the nation.

1. An effective program engages people in responsible and challenging actions for the common

good.

2. An effective program provides structured opportunities for people to reflect critically on their service experience.
3. An effective program articulates clear service and learning goals for everyone involved.
4. An effective program allows for those with needs to define those needs.
5. An effective program clarifies the responsibilities of each person and organization involved.
6. An effective program matches service providers and service needs through a process that recognizes changing circumstances.
7. An effective program expects genuine, active, and sustained organizational commitment.
8. An effective program includes training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition, and evaluation to meet service and learning goals.
9. An effective program insures that the time commitment for service and learning is flexible, appropriate, and in the best interests of all involved.
10. An effective program is committed to program participation by and with diverse populations.

Honnet, E.P., and S.J. Poulen. (1989). Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning, *a Wingspread Special Report*. Racine, WI: The Johnson Foundation, Inc.

Reflection Activities

Discussions -

Exchange of ideas between students and faculty about how the subject matter of the course can provide service-learners a chance to relate their service to course concepts and share their experiences with traditional learners. Discussions need not be focused on the service aspect of the students' experiences, but course concepts. Discussions offer a forum which encourages students (both traditional and service-learning) to process and relate what they are studying, doing, and learning, and is an opportunity for the instructor to emphasize key concepts through the examples provided by the students. Faculty may arrange discussions separately for service-learners and for traditional students, however this is not necessary. With content-focused discussion questions and encouragement for service-learning students to apply their service experience in the discussion, all class members can be included and benefit.

Journals -

Reflective writing is a primary tool used by educators engaged in service-learning. Asking students to consider their experiences can be very effective, however, it is important to guide students in their journals so that they are not simply logs of events. The students should be encouraged to address objective events, subjective impressions, and an analytic response, at the very least, in each journal entry. In addition, some instructors include specific guided questions that assist students to integrate

their experience with particular course concepts. Journals are reviewed periodically by the faculty member during the semester..

Microcosm -

In the classroom, students explore a broad concept or issue by examining its impact on a local entity, incorporating the experience of the service-learning students whose service addresses the issue. For instance, students might study the availability of health care in the community in studying the local Free Clinic. Local issues and problems are a microcosm for studying broader topics.

Analytical Papers -

In contrast with a traditional research paper, service-learners can incorporate examples from their service experiences with course material to demonstrate their learning. Analytical papers might include:

- a detailed description of the type of work they did, the environment and goals of the agency and/or project, and a summary of their experiences;
- an evaluation of the purpose and meaning of their service and the needs they met, what they learned from their experience, the strengths and limitations of those addressing the issues and needs, and changes and improvements they would make in their service and the project or agency; and
- an integration section in which students elaborate on how their service experience related to and/or conflicted with course concepts, affected their evaluation of or changed their assumptions about the material discussed in class, demonstrated ways in which academic learning is relevant and can be applied in the community, and ways in which their experience impacted their educational and/or career goals.

Portfolios

Compiling an array of materials related to their service can help contextualize students' experiences. Some service-learning portfolios consist of other reflection elements, such as a journal, a paper or presentation. They can also hold artifacts from the service project, such as pictures, brochures, as well as additional items which might relate to the service project and the course, such as newspaper clippings, articles, etc. As a practical tool, portfolios can further serve as an organizer for the various documentation for the service-learning experience, such as the time-sheet, handbook, service-learning agreement, and training materials. Both faculty and students can be very creative with the portfolio concept and find many ways to use it.

Presentations -

Either group or individual presentations by service-learning students to the class can offer traditional students a chance to learn from the others' experiences. Following the same format as the analytical paper, students can describe, evaluate, and integrate their service with the course, while also using visual materials and responding to questions to convey their learning to the instructor and class.

Reading Responses -

Students write about their service experience in relation to assigned course readings. The questions you formulate for their responses can be open-ended or pointed in helping students think critically about the academic material in a real-world context. This activity can be particularly valuable when

the readings incorporate the similar issues as those being confronted by the service agencies and projects engaging the students.

Student Forum -

Electronically (by e-mail or listserv) or during in-class forum groups, students respond in writing to your discussion questions and to each other. Each student should talk about or post a response to the week's reflection question and to at least one other student's entry. Some discussion questions may be directly related to course readings, others more open-ended regarding their service or personal perceptions and experiences. You respond to students as appropriate and can use their entries in the forum for future discussion topics. A listserv allows both service-learning and traditional students to consider the values, ideas, and experiences of other students, and your questions can guide them towards integrating these with course material.

REFLECTION CHECKLIST

The following tips may assist you in designing the reflection component of your service-learning course.

- ✓ Consider your mission statement or course goals. Does reflection fit into the mission of your program or the goals of your course?
- ✓ Look at the structure of your program or class. What are the current opportunities for students to reflect? Select areas or opportunities that lend themselves to reflection.
- ✓ Identify the problems that volunteers or students may articulate. They will be more likely to participate in a reflection component if it directly addresses their needs and concerns.
- ✓ Create a set of goals. What do you want to get out of reflection? What do you want participants to get out of it?
- ✓ Set an expectation. Try to show through example that reflection is an integral part of your program or course.
- ✓ Assess your skills. The most important facilitative skills are listening and asking good questions. What other skills might you need?
- ✓ Evaluate your audience. What will be of most interest to them?
- ✓ Find partners. Talk to other professors, program leaders, students, and community members to create a network that will provide support.
- ✓ Develop resources by contacting faculty, staff, agency representatives, and community members.
- ✓ Choose appropriate methods. Think creatively about how to integrate reflection into the existing framework.
- ✓ Evaluate your reflection method. Did it meet your objectives? Did participants find reflection helpful? What would you change for the next reflection activity?

Reflection Questions

Some questions you might present for your students to consider in discussions, journals, portfolios, student forums, and other contexts:

- What expectations do you have about your service experience?
- What do you think your project or the service agency will be like?
- What do you think you will do and what impact do you think you will have?
- What are the social issues that this project or service agency addresses?
- How does this project or agency address community needs?
- What are the causes of those community needs?
- How do people contribute to this problem? How do we help to solve it?
- Did anything surprise you? If so, what?
- What did you do today that made you feel that you made a difference? Why?
- Did anything happen that made you feel uncomfortable? If so what, and why do you think it made you feel this way?
- What did you do that seemed to be effective or ineffective in service to others?
- How does your understanding of the community change as a result of your participation in this project?
- How can you continue your involvement with this group or social issue?
- How can you educate others or raise awareness about this group or social issue?

Virginia Campus Outreach Opportunity League. (1995). *Reflections - A Resource Book*.

- What is the most positive thing that happened in your service experience this week?
- What are the most difficult and most satisfying parts of your work? Why?
- What do you think is your most valued contribution of your project?
- Is there a person or activity you finding interesting or challenging in your project?
- How do you see your role with this project? How does that compare with how others may see your role?
- Have you learned from any disappointments or successes of your project?

- Has there been a problem situation that you want to discuss with your supervisor or instructor?
- How is your service relevant to the readings and discussions in class?
- How does your service experience connect to your long-term goals?

Center for Public Policy & Service, Mesa Community College. *Student Guide for Service-Learning.*