What is Service-Learning?

Service-learning is the pedagogy that links service and academic study so that each strengthens the other. The basic theory of service learning originated from John Dewey’s belief that the interaction of knowledge and skills with experience is key to learning. Service-learning is an approach to experiential learning, whereby students learn and develop through active participation and engage in activities that address human and community needs together.

Service-learning is a form of experiential learning that occurs in settings where a student learner seeks to meet their own learning needs while engaged in tasks identified by the local community. In this approach to service-learning, not only is the student a learner, but faculty, community organization staff and community residents are seen as learners as well. [National Society for Experiential Education]

What distinguishes service-learning from other volunteer experiences is the intentional integration of service and learning and the reciprocal nature of both the service and the learning among all parties in the relationship: students, faculty, and community partners. Service-learning helps foster civic responsibility, enhances the academic curriculum by connecting academic theory with experience; and includes structured reflection [adapted from the Corporation for National Service RFP].

Service-learning is different from:

Volunteerism ...where the primary emphasis is on the service being provided and the primary intended beneficiary is clearly the service recipient.

Community Service...where the primary focus [is] on the service being provided as well as the benefits the service activities have on the recipients. The students receive some benefits by learning more about how their service makes a difference.

Internships...[that] engage students in service activities primarily for the purpose of providing students with hands-on experiences that enhance their learning or understanding of issues relevant to a particular area of study.

Field Education...[that] provide students with co-curricular service opportunities that are related, but not fully integrated, with their formal academic studies. Students perform the service as a part of a program that is designed primarily to enhance students’ understanding of a field of study, while also providing substantial emphasis on the service being provided.

Potential Benefits of Academic Service-Learning Partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develops skills and helps apply course material to new situations</td>
<td>Redefines role of teacher from giver of knowledge to facilitator of knowledge</td>
<td>Contributes to community development and renewal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develops critical thinking skills</td>
<td>Teaching becomes more process oriented due to interaction with students</td>
<td>Extends community’s human resources to address unmet needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages all learners, not just more vocal or assertive</td>
<td>Impacts how you teach, what you teach, and where you teach</td>
<td>Provides community organizations with an inside look at university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improves self-confidence</td>
<td>Influences curriculum offerings</td>
<td>Gets things done!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotes a sense of belonging to a community and usefulness to society</td>
<td>Becomes an excellent recruitment and retention strategy of courses and departments because students are engaged</td>
<td>Demonstrates that students are learning skills of use to society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides work experience and networking opportunities</td>
<td>Provides for connections between research and teaching</td>
<td>Formalizes connections with university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases civic and active citizenship skills</td>
<td>Promotes democratic citizenship and leadership skill development</td>
<td>Develops future community leaders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Potential Barriers to Community-University Partnerships for Service-Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time and money given demands of school, necessity of work, and families</td>
<td>Research is viewed as the most important aspect of the mission, leaving little time to coordinate work of students with community</td>
<td>Lack of time for training and supervision for the contribution given by the students to the organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of unfamiliar neighborhoods and working with people you’ve never had experience interacting with</td>
<td>Fear of unknown and letting go of control of the classroom when the impact of service-learning is not easy to quantify in short term</td>
<td>Fear of having people come in for only a short time and leave causing more damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of transportation to get to organizations</td>
<td>Requires rethinking and changes to curriculum</td>
<td>Difficulty recruiting students to work with organization due to location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support given by instructor</td>
<td>Lack of institutional and departmental support given to faculty (tenure decisions)</td>
<td>Seeing undesired changes in community or no changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of asking for help because it requires willingness to admit vulnerability</td>
<td>Having to answer a lot of questions from students and having more questions themselves</td>
<td>Fear of exploitation due to history of being “used” by academic institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treating service-learning as a service-only experience not a reciprocal learning experience</td>
<td>Viewing service-learning as soft, non-rigorous, non-academic learning or as an add-on, not an integral aspect of the course</td>
<td>Difficulty finding work to be done by students that meets students/faculty goals and community goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information compiled by the Career and Community Learning Center, University of Minnesota, 2001
Helpful Hints as Co-Educators

Communicate, communicate, communicate: report problems or concerns to CCLC, let us know about changes in staff, provide current job descriptions and updated opportunity listings information

Complete community service learning contract with students

Perform student evaluations at mid semester and end of the semester, and share them with the student

Keep track of students and their hours

Have supervisor available on-site

Provide orientation and training

Provide students the opportunity to continually offer their feedback about their experience

Keep projects focused

Establish realistic expectations and communicate those to the students

Recognize student work, let them know their work is appreciated

Encourage students to attend a “Get Up, Get Into It, Get Involved” training session, and attend yourself

Provide reflection opportunities for students at your organization

Discuss transportation with students, learn your bus routes: website www.metrotransit.org
Service Learning on the World Wide Web

Campus Compact—http://www.compact.org
American Association for Higher Education Service Learning Project—
http://www.aacc.nche.edu/initiatives/SERVICE/SERVICE.HTM
The Big Dummy’s Guide to Service Learning—
http://www.fiu.edu/~time4chg/Library/bigdummy.html
Learn and Serve America Training and Technical Assistance Exchange—
http://www.Isaexchange.org
Minnesota Campus Compact—http://department.stthomas.edu/mncc/
The National Service Learning Clearinghouse—http://www.nicsl.coed.umn.edu
National Society for Experiential Education—http://www.nsee.org
Reflection Ideas: Center for Service Learning at Denison University—
http://www.denison.edu/service-learning/refideas.shtml
Service Learning Internet Community—http://www.slic.calstate.edu
Service Reflection Toolkit by Northwest Service Academy—
http://www.etr.org/nsrc/pdfs/nwtoolkit.pdf
Reading for Service Learning


The Student Training Manual at the Career and Community Learning Center has a compilation of over 35 different reflection activities and icebreakers.