Potential Benefits and Barriers to Service-Learning

As instructors begin the process of integrating service-learning into their discipline, there are some considerations to both the benefits and barriers of academic service-learning that should be considered. The two tables below are derived from University of Minnesota faculty, students and community partner reflections on their role in service-learning.

**Potential Benefits for:**

**Students**
- Develops skills and helps apply course material to new situations
- Develops critical thinking skills
- Engages all learners, not just more vocal or assertive
- Improves self-confidence
- Promotes a sense of belonging to a community and usefulness to society
- Provides work experience and networking opportunities
- Increases civic and active citizenship skills

**Faculty**
- Redefines role of teacher from giver of knowledge to facilitator of knowledge
- Teaching becomes more process oriented due to interaction with students
- Impacts how you teach, what you teach, and where you teach
- Influences curriculum offerings
- Becomes an excellent recruitment and retention strategy for courses and departments because students are engaged
- Provides for connections between research and teaching
- Promotes democratic citizenship and leadership skill development

**Community**
- Contributes to community development and renewal
- Extends community’s human resources to address unmet needs
- Provides community organizations with an inside look at the university
- Gets things done!
- Demonstrates that students are learning skills of use to society
- Formalizes connections with the university
- Develops future community leaders

**Potential Barriers for:**

**Students**
- Lack of time and money given demands of school, necessity of work, and family
- Fear of unfamiliar neighborhoods and working with people you’ve never had experience interacting with
- Lack of transportation to get to organizations
- Lack of support given by the faculty member
- Fear of asking for direction, clarification and guidance from the site supervisor and/or the faculty member
- Treating service-learning as a service-only experience not a reciprocal learning experience

**Faculty**
- Research is viewed as the most important aspect of your work, leaving little time to coordinate work of students with community
- 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
- Requires rethinking and making changes to curriculum
- Lack of institutional and departmental support given to faculty (tenure decisions)
- Having to answer a lot of questions from students, questions that they may not know the answers
- Viewing service-learning as soft, non-rigorous, non-academic learning or as an add-on, not an integral aspect of the course

**Community**
- Lack of time for training and supervision for the contribution given by the students to the organization
- Fear of having people come in for only a short time and leave causing more damage
- Difficulty recruiting students to work with organization due to location
- Seeing undesired changes in community or no changes
- Fear of exploitation due to history of being “used” by academic institutions
- Difficulty finding work to be done by students that meets students/ faculty goals and community goals