

## 1.2 Defining Service-Learning

Service-learning is a multifaceted concept that embraces both curricular and co-curricular approaches to service and educational opportunities. The hyphen between the words "service" and "learning" strongly suggests a balance between learning goals and service outcomes that can be achieved only through an integration of each. The Council for the Advancement of Standard (CAS) in Higher Education defines service-learning as “a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development.”<sup>2</sup> While there are various definitions and interpretations of service-learning, this definition most accurately represents the concept in action at St. Norbert College.

Since St. Norbert College values a holistic approach to student development that encompasses both academic and co-curricular learning objectives, the Center for Community Service & Learning (CCSL) has consciously chosen to apply service-learning principles to both the curricular and co-curricular realms; therefore instituting a differentiation between Academic Service-Learning (ASL) and Co-Curricular Service-Learning (CoSL)<sup>3</sup>. Academic Service-Learning at St. Norbert College is defined as “a pedagogical method that enhances the curriculum by integrating academic and civic learning with authentic community service.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Academic Service-Learning and Co-Curricular Service-Learning<sup>5</sup>**

Academic service-learning is not the same as student community service or co-curricular service-learning. While sharing the word “service,” these models of student involvement in the community are distinguished by their learning agenda. Student community service, illustrated by a student organization adopting a local elementary school, rarely involves a learning agenda. In contrast, both forms of service-learning – academic and co-curricular – make intentional efforts to engage students in planned and purposeful learning related to the service experiences. Co-curricular service-learning, illustrated by many alternative spring break programs, is concerned with raising students’ consciousness and familiarity with issues related to various communities. Academic service-learning, illustrated by student community service integrated into an academic course, utilizes the service experience as a course “text” for both academic learning and civic learning.

### **Three Necessary Criteria for Academic Service-Learning<sup>6</sup>**

The definition of Academic Service-Learning at St. Norbert College (*a pedagogical method that enhances the curriculum by integrating academic and civic learning with authentic community service*) reflects the three criteria set forth by Jeffrey Howard,

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<sup>2</sup> CAS Professional Standards for Higher Education, p. 302

<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that the use of the term ‘service-learning’ varies among institutions of higher education. Some institutions, such as Marquette University, use ‘service-learning’ strictly for academic purposes and not in reference to co-curricular service activities.

<sup>4</sup> ASL Proposal, p. 1

<sup>5</sup> Service-Learning Course Design Workbook, *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, p. 10

<sup>6</sup> Service-Learning Course Design Workbook, *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* p. 12

Editor of the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, for determining whether or not a course is considered service-learning. The three criteria are as follows:

- (1) Relevant and Meaningful Service with the Community – there must be service provided in the community that is both relevant and meaningful to all stakeholder parties.
- (2) Enhanced Academic Learning – the addition of relevant and meaningful service with the community must not only serve the community but also enhance student academic learning in the course.
- (3) Purposeful Civic Learning – the addition of relevant and meaningful service with the community must not only service the community and enhance student academic learning in the course, but also directly and intentionally prepare students for active civic participation in a diverse democratic society.

**Academic Service-Learning Compared to Other Forms of Experiential Learning**

The following table illustrates the differences between popular community-based learning methods in relation to Howard’s necessary criteria mentioned above.

<b>Matrix 1 Distinguishing Characteristics of Some Common Student Community-Based Experiences</b>			
	<b>Community Service</b>	<b>Enhanced Academic Learning</b>	<b>Purposeful Civic Learning</b>
<b>Volunteering or Community Service</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	No
<b>Co-Curricular Service-Learning</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Academic Service-Learning</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Internship</b>	<b>Yes*</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No

\*Not all internships involve service in the community.

Academic and Co-Curricular Service-Learning focus equally on learning objectives (academic or not) and service activities and are designed to benefit both the student and the community. Volunteerism and community service activities focus on the service being performed and place less emphasis on structured reflection and/or learning opportunities for students, which results in the community being the main beneficiary of the service activities. Internships and field education focus more on providing students with experience in a particular field of study and focus less on intentional service to the community, resulting in students being the main beneficiaries.