

1.7 Common Faculty Concerns

Academic rigor: Is service-learning just another way of attempting to water down academic standards at the college?

One of the most important points to keep in mind when thinking about service-learning is that at no time does service *take the place of* learning. What students are learning in the classroom should drive their service activities. If a service-learning class is designed and carried out properly, it will actually be *even more* rigorous than traditionally-structured courses. In service-learning courses, students are not only being asked to master course material, they are also being asked to take the information that they are being taught in the classroom and apply it to the experiences that they are having at their site placement. Remember: Using service-learning pedagogy does not change the content that you teach, it only changes *how* you teach it.

Will I be able to apply service-learning pedagogy successfully?

Any time you incorporate new pedagogical strategies into your teaching, your competencies are going to be challenged. With service-learning, this is also the case. Many educators will have to assume an entirely different role in the teaching-learning process, moving from that of teacher to that of guide. Academic service-learning demonstrates the shift away from the traditional focus on teaching in higher education to the new emphasis on learning. The table below illustrates the emphasis shift from ‘Teaching’ to ‘Learning’ as it relates to core concepts of teaching and learning.¹⁰

Core Concept	Teaching Emphasis	Learning Emphasis
Knowledge	Acquisition	Application
Focus	Individual	Team/Community
Curriculum Definition	By Faculty	By faculty, community, & students
Instruction	Teacher centered	Collective
Design	Prescribed courses	Integrated sequence
Student Learning	Passive	Active
Change	Sporadic reform	Continuous improvement

How do I fit something entirely new into a course with a full syllabus?

Academic service-learning is not an add-on to the current requirements of your course. As you begin to incorporate service-learning into your teaching, some of your traditional teaching techniques may be replaced with more dynamic learning activities (as indicated by the table on this page). Many professors note that there is an initial “set-up time” required with service-learning classes that may exceed the time professors generally spend preparing for a course, but are quick to point out that the higher levels of student engagement in their courses more than make up for any extra time they spend doing the initial planning.

¹⁰ Adapted from Gelmon, Sherril B., et al. *Assessing Service-Learning and Civic Engagement: Principles and Techniques*. (2001) Providence, RI: Campus Compact, p. 2

Many students at the College work in addition to carrying heavy course loads. How can I ask that they find space for community service in their already jam-packed schedules?

Faculty who use service-learning as a teaching method report that their students are attracted to their courses by the service component. However, if you find that your students are struggling to meet the time requirements, there are a few options that you might want to consider: 1) Make the service-learning component of your course optional; 2) Try to develop a varied list of site placements which allow students to serve at different times of day, on weekends, and at night. More flexibility enables students to fit service-learning into their schedules at their convenience, and 3) Consider scheduling the service-learning course as a course with a lab. Students could then use the designated “lab” time to go to their service site.

What if the connection between service and learning is not understood well in my discipline?

Many professors in the “hard” sciences, such as Chemistry, Physics, and Biology, are initially resistant to using service-learning as a teaching method in their classes because they are unable to imagine site placements directly related to their course content areas. Students in the hard sciences do their learning in lectures and labs, and labs are where the experiential learning takes place. However, while finding a connection between learning in the classroom and service to the community may be easier in some subject areas, and more difficult in others, it can be effective in any field.