

Section Two: Developing & Implementing a Service-Learning Course

2.1 Steps for Integrating Service-Learning into the Curriculum

Incorporating service-learning into a course requires thoughtful pre-planning and thorough follow-up. Remember that the service activity is not an additional component, but an alternative way to teach course concepts. Successful learning and effective community contributions depend upon a well-integrated package of syllabus, orientation, reflection, and assessment.

Step 1: Reflect and Gather Resources The faculty member should reflect upon the call or motivation to teach an Academic Service-Learning course. A helpful reflection and preparation tool is the *Thinking About Academic Service-Learning?* worksheet (Appendix A). This worksheet will assist the faculty member in considering community needs, brainstorming ideas for service-learning projects, and determining learning goals for students. The Faculty member should review the College's definition of Academic Service-Learning, benefits of ASL, Principles of Good Practice for Service-Learning Pedagogy, and common faculty and community partner concerns, all of which can be found in **Section One** of this handbook. Faculty members may also find it useful to review sample syllabi and course projects which can be found in Appendix D or in the Faculty resources on the CCSL website www.snc.edu/ccsl

Step 2: Seek Consultation & Training The faculty member is invited to seek one-on-one consultation from the CCSL. The Academic Service-Learning Coordinator and CCSL staff will assist faculty with any step of planning and/or implementing a service-learning course. Faculty members might consider taking advantage of professional development opportunities, such as workshops and conferences when possible. A list of upcoming conferences and training opportunities can be obtained by visiting the CCSL website www.snc.edu/ccsl or contacting the CCSL at ext. 3374 or ccsl@snc.edu.

Step 3: Explore Partnerships with Community With support from the CCSL, the faculty member should research local community agencies that would be appropriate partners for his/her service-learning course. The CCSL can provide a list of community agencies that may accommodate the type of service-learning project the faculty member is interested in developing. The CCSL can help determine an appropriate match with a community partner.

*Helpful Tips for Faculty*¹²:

- Research an agency's history, mission, and related social issues before making contact.
- Meet agency representatives at their office whenever possible. When visiting the agency or service site, note details on location, transportation, and parking that will be pertinent to your students.

¹² Adapted from Louisiana State University, CCELL Service-Learning Faculty Partner Handbook. Pg 10

- When inviting community partners to campus, make sure they have directions to the College and send them a campus map as well as parking instructions for visitors. (<http://www.snc.edu/communications/aboutsnc/images/directions/campusmap.pdf>)
- Ask the agency how what you have to offer might be useful to them and be sure to have a clear understanding of the agency's needs. It is important to approach the community organization with an attitude of mutual respect and openness in order to foster clear communication.
- Be open to indirect service projects. Consider how you can help students see the value of service that provides support to community with little direct contact.
- Be sure to discuss the following with the community agency: main contact person, location, orientation and training requirements, hours of operation or need, and number of students they can accommodate. Learn all you can about the agency's mission and needs.
- Learn about the assets of the agency and its clientele. Explore the organizations' capacities and abilities and relate this to your students. Remember that reciprocity is integral to service-learning.
- Keep in mind that the community and the clientele are not a teaching or research laboratory. The notion of community as laboratory assumes a false hierarchy of power and perpetuates an attitude of institutional superiority. Basic goals of service-learning include community development and empowerment. For these goals to be realized, faculty and community must be equal partners and view themselves as co-educators.
- Invite community partners to be a part of reflections, presentations, awards ceremonies, and related activities.

Step 4: Design or Redesign the Course Once a faculty member has found an appropriate community agency to partner with, the specific details of the course can be established. The faculty member should work as closely as possible with the community partner to design or redesign the service-learning course, *especially when solidifying student learning goals and details about the service experience.*

There are four common service-learning course models from which faculty members can choose:

Placement Model: Students are placed at or choose a community agency and work with client(s) regularly for the duration of the course. The service provided by the students is a learning tool. Students gain access to populations or issues related to their courses and, in turn, provide needed assistance to the community. Students may be placed at the same site or multiple, depending on the course structure.

Presentation Model: Students work in small groups to create presentations from material they are learning in the course and present to local community agencies and/or members that may benefit from their information. Faculty may require students to present in class before going into the community. Typically, presentations are youth-centered and include topics such as nutrition, exercise,

college/career exploration, etc. Presentations could also be used to raise awareness about various issues such as the environment, politics, diversity, etc.

Product Model: Students utilize knowledge gained from the class to create a tangible result such as brochures or other written materials, a video, advertisement, website, etc. The product is then given to a community agency for a specific purpose. Students can work in small groups to develop products for multiple agencies or the class as a whole can create a product for one agency.

Project Model: Students collaborate with community agencies to devise and implement a project that incorporates course materials and meets a community-identified need.

As Faculty members plan their courses, they should consider which model will best serve the learning goals of the course and meet the community-identified needs. Faculty members might ask themselves the following questions:

What are my learning objectives for this service-learning course?

- Do I want my students to deepen their understanding of a particular concept or of the overriding theories of this course?
- What kinds of activities would help them achieve that goal?
- How can I structure the project to insure that it will call on my students to use all their knowledge and skills?

What knowledge/skills must my students (and I) have prior to beginning the project?

- Am I sure all of the students enrolled in the class will be ready (course content thus far, pre-requisite courses, etc.)?
- Based on the typical draw of students for this course, what kind of ‘crew’ will I have to work with?
- Will I have advanced students within the major?
- Will I have too many students for one group project?
- Does the project require some levels of expertise my students do not possess?
- Are my students likely to have any biases, fears, or other barriers to committing to the community partner and the population it serves?
- How can I help them overcome or at least manage those barriers?
- Can I involve outside experts in some way to help cover any knowledge/skills gaps?
- Do I have expertise (in some cases credentials) to function effectively and responsibly as a “consultant” on this project to insure that the community partner is satisfied with the quality of results?

What is the project scope?

- What does the community partner need our class to accomplish?
- What is the minimum necessary outcome? What is the ideal outcome?
- Will the community partner suffer any tangible negative consequences if the class fails to meet the minimum outcome?

- Is it important that every student is involved in the service component of the course, or do I want to offer an equally rigorous alternative project for some students?
- Will student learning goals be best achieved through completing the service experience individually, in small groups, or as a whole class?
- Will all students in the course serve at the same community agency or will there be multiple service sites?
- Can my learning goals be accomplished with a one-shot project, or do I expect a long-term engagement with the community partner?
- Could the project be divided between two classes? Might the project be too small for my class-can I safely commit to something bigger or more challenging?
- Will the project be a unit within the course or be integrated throughout the semester?
- Should I expect a minimum number of hours, or is it more important that students provide consistent and dependable service or a deliverable project?
- Does my plan provide opportunities for students to discover community assets as well as problems? Will students work *with* the community rather than *for* it?

Helpful tips for Faculty:

- Maintain clear communication with the community partner and make sure there is consistency between your learning goals and their needs.
- Be sure that the community partner understands what types of service are appropriate and inappropriate to your goals. Encourage the community partner to accept only as many students for whom it can provide meaningful work.
- Discuss the need for students to have adequate orientation and supervision and a safe working environment.
- Engage the agencies in a teaching partnership by suggesting that they look for opportunities to share what they have learned with your students.
- Discuss the best method for maintaining communication with the community partner throughout the semester (phone call, email, scheduled follow-ups or as needed) and what the students' role is in maintaining communication.
- Discuss a method for evaluating students' service activities
- Sign the *Faculty/Community Partner/Student Service-Learning Agreement* (See Useful Forms Section) with your partner.

Step 5: Develop a Syllabus. Faculty members are encouraged to seek assistance from the CCSL when developing a service-learning syllabus. In addition to meeting with CCSL staff, faculty members can check out print resources to guide them in course and syllabi development. Visit the CCSL website at www.snc.edu/ccsl to view sample syllabi.

General advice for developing a service-learning syllabus¹³:

- Consult the community agency/agencies to ensure that proposed learning goals will be integrated with meeting community needs through the service project(s).
- Provide students with a rationale for the use of service-learning in the course.
- Identify the service activity and learning goals of the service.
- If service is offered as an option, provide alternatives that are equally rigorous. Service should not be an unfair burden to students.

¹³ Adapted from Louisiana State University, CCELL Service-Learning Faculty Partner Handbook. Pg 11

- Link the service to course content with writing assignments, discussion topics, readings, presentations, and other activities listed in the syllabus.
- Clearly explain the incentive(s) for successful completion of the experience.
- Provide clear links between course content, service activity, and student success.
- Describe how students will be assessed on the experience. Clarify that the grade is for processing their experience – through papers, journals, portfolios, discussions, presentations, etc. – not for the service hours alone.
- Review the syllabus with the community agency/agencies and provide them with a finalized copy.
- Faculty are encouraged to email finalized service-learning course syllabi to ccsl@snc.edu for the course to be identified as service-learning.

*An exemplary service-learning syllabus will contain the following:*¹⁴

- Include service as an expressed goal
- Clearly describe how the service experience will be measured and what will be measured
- Describe the nature of the service placement and/or project
- Describe learning goals and objectives of the service-learning and anticipated outcomes of the experiences for both students and the community agency/agencies
- Specify the roles and responsibilities of students in the placement and/or service project (e.g. time requirements, community contacts, etc.)
- Define the need(s) the service placement or project meets
- Clearly describe the community agency's role as *co-educator*
- Specify how students will be expected to demonstrate what they have learned in the placement/project (structured journal, papers, presentations, etc.)
- Present course assignments that link the service placement or project and the course content
- Include a description of the reflective process
- Include a description of the expectations for the public dissemination of students' work (e.g. if students are doing a project, how will the project be presented to the community?)

Step 6: Provide Orientation & Training for Students The service experience should be discussed on the first day of class. Faculty members should walk students through the syllabus to explain learning goals and clarify the expectations of students for the course in and out of the classroom. Faculty members should prepare students, as much as possible, with the appropriate skills and brief them on their responsibilities regarding communication, follow-through, and professionalism. Student concerns, fears, and expectations regarding the service experience should also be addressed prior to beginning service-learning projects.

It is critical that the students, not only the faculty member, are familiar with the community agency before beginning their service-learning project. Students should understand the agency's mission statement and the services provided. Additionally,

¹⁴ Adapted from Heffernan, K. (2001). Fundamentals of service-learning course construction. Providence, RI: Campus Compact.

students should possess knowledge of the population that is served by the agency. Faculty members can present this information to the class or assign the *Community Agency Background Information* (Appendix A) worksheet for students to complete. If the students will be working with different community agencies, assigning the worksheet may be more efficient and provide an opportunity for each student to briefly present his/her service site to the class. The following section, ***Diversity and Academic Service-Learning***, will also serve as a helpful guide for faculty members to provide thorough preparation for their students and community partners.

Diversity and Academic Service-Learning¹⁵

Academic service-learning provides rich opportunities for students to experience and understand diversity in meaningful ways. It is a vehicle for students to learn from other cultures and explore differences beyond ethnicity. Planning, processing, and identifying common hurdles will optimize your students' opportunities to learn about diversity.

Expand the definition of culture and diversity. Culture and diversity are often defined in terms of ethnicity, race, or gender. Consider the following factors and the ways they influence your students' perceptions and reflections:

- Socio-economic status
- Geographic place
- Atmosphere or environment
- Values
- Beliefs
- Traditions

Take an inventory to understand the culture of your class:

- What are the different ethnicities represented?
- What are the geographic places your students call home?
- What is the age range?
- Where are they in terms of student development?
- What are their learning styles—visual, auditory, or kinesthetic?

Take an inventory to understand the culture of the agency:

- What is the size of the organization?
- What is their history?
- What is the environment or atmosphere of the organization? Formal? Informal?

Take an inventory to understand the culture of the recipients:

- How would you describe the clients being served?
- What are their stories?
- What are the stereotypes and what are the realities?
- What opportunities do you have to demystify stereotypes?

Prepare the agency, recipients, and students for diversity issues:

- Help the students understand what has shaped their own cultural identity.

¹⁵ Adapted from Louisiana State University, CCELL Service-Learning Faculty Partner Handbook. Pg 17

- Define and create an atmosphere that respects and nurtures differences.
- Model the type of behavior that supports respect for diversity.
- Facilitate exercises and activities that create awareness of the diversity issues present in the service-learning activity.
- Provide orientations that demystify stereotypes of students to agencies, and vice versa.
- Explain the differences between the culture of the non-profit and the culture of student life.

Step 7: Supervise Students Students should be provided with a timeline that includes benchmarks for contacting the community partner, meetings with supervisors, signing agreements and waivers, beginning and completing the service, and completing evaluations. A schedule will help prevent students from procrastinating and trying to complete their service at the end of the semester. For students who are legitimately unable to participate in or complete the service, faculty should consider providing an alternative project or assignment. Faculty members should contact the community partner at least once mid-semester to seek feedback and, when possible, visit the service site(s) to observe the student-community partnership in action. Maintaining communication with the community partner is not only important for the service-learning partnership, but also contributes to student accountability. On request, the CCSL staff can assist with follow-up. The CCSL should be notified of any serious concerns or problems that arise with students at the service sites.

Step 8: Implement Critical Reflection and Analysis Activities¹⁶ According to John Dewey, “truly educative” experiences generate interest, are intrinsically worthwhile, present problems that awaken new curiosity and create a demand for new information, and take sufficient time to foster development. Critical reflection and analysis are crucial to the process of transforming experiences gained from the service activities and the course materials into genuine learning. Reflection is essential for integrating the service experience with the classroom topics. It fosters learning about larger social issues such as the political, economic, and sociological characteristics of our communities. Reflection enhances students’ critical understanding of the course topics and their ability to assess their own values, goals, and progress.

Critical Reflection

Reflection is a process designed to promote the examination and interpretation of experience and the promotion of cognitive learning. It is "a process by which service-learners think critically about their experiences." It is the process of looking back on the implications of actions taken - good and bad - and determining what has been gained, lost, or achieved and connecting these conclusions to future actions and larger societal contexts. Through reflection students analyze concepts, evaluate experiences, and postulate theory. Critical reflection provides students with the opportunity to examine and question their beliefs, opinions, and values. It involves observation, asking questions, and putting facts, ideas, and experiences together to derive new meaning.

¹⁶ Adapted from Louisiana State University, CCELL Service-Learning Faculty Partner Handbook. Pg 13-16

Benefits of Critical Reflection

Reflection improves basic academic skills and promotes a deeper understanding of course subject matter and its relations to the non-academic world; it improves higher level thinking and problem solving and students' ability to learn from experience. Critical reflection promotes personal development by enhancing students' self-awareness, their sense of community, and their sense of their own capacities.

Facilitating Critical Reflection and Analysis

Effective reflection depends on appropriate contexts and real problems and issues. The culture of the class community must be one in which students feel included, respected, and safe. The dialogue between instructor and students must be meaningful to the students. Students are helped to feel respected and included in the class community through small groups in which they can exchange concerns, experiences, and expectations about the service and the class. By involving them in real community problems, service-learning provides students with a need to know, a desire to enhance their skills and a commitment to solving problems of importance to them. Visit the CCSL website at www.snc.edu/ccsl for reflection resources.

Helpful tips for Faculty:

- Prepare a framework for guiding the discussion.
- Lead the group by actively engaging each student.
- Clarify students' responsibilities and expectations. Write them down and copy for all.
- Set the tone by establishing norms of behavior.
- Insist that responses are clear and coherent.
- Arouse interest and commitment to service-learning.
- Assess the values, knowledge, and skills that each student brings to the project.
- Develop background information about the people and problems the students will encounter in the service situations to sensitize them and help to revise any misconceptions.
- Develop and practice with students any skills that will be required, including being active observers and questioners of experience.
- Explore emotional/affective issues as appropriate.
- Leave some cognitive/topical issues open until the next session to give group members an opportunity to think more about them.
- Caution students about protecting the confidentiality and integrity of persons at their worksite.

Effective Academic Service-Learning reflection will:

- Occur before, during, and after the service component of the course.
- Clearly link the service experience to the course content and learning objectives
- Be structured in terms of description, expectation, and the criteria for assessing the activity
- Occur regularly during the semester so that students can practice reflection and develop the capacity to engage in deeper and broader reflection

- Provide feedback from the instructor about at least some of the reflection activities so that students learn how to improve their critical analysis and develop from reflective practice
- Include the opportunity for students to explore, clarify, and alter their values.

Activities for Critical Analysis and Reflection in the Classroom

When facilitating reflection, vary the activities to accommodate multiple learning styles; create a reflective classroom – do not just add a reflective component. Listed below are examples of activities faculty members can use to facilitate critical analysis and reflection in their service-learning courses.

Journals

Students may be asked to keep a journal as they engage in the service experience. The journals should not merely be simple inventories of events. They should address situations objectively, subjectively, and analytically. Instructors may provide questions to guide students in addressing issues and they should review the journals periodically. It is helpful to offer written comments, questions, and feedback that will encourage, challenge, and provide a dialogue that deepens the students' thought processes. Taking up an entry each week or reading a weekly online posting can ameliorate worksite problems and challenge students to rigorous intellectual inquiry.

The ORID Model

The ORID model provides a progression of question types designed to move students from reflecting on the concrete experience to analytical and subjective reasoning. It may be used to create journal or discussion questions and to guide assignments and activity types. The progression may be completed within one assignment and/or over the whole semester.

- **Objective:** Begin with questions related to the concrete experience. What did students do, observe, read, and hear? Who was involved? What was said? What happened as a result of their work?
- **Reflective:** Next introduce questions that address the affective experience. How did the experience feel? What did it remind students of? How did their apprehension change or their confidence grow? Did they feel successful, effective, and knowledgeable?
- **Interpretive:** Ask questions that explore the cognitive experience. What did the experience make them think? How did it change their thinking? What did they learn? What worked? How does the experience connect with classroom learning?
- **Decisional:** Finally, students are prepared to incorporate their experience into a new paradigm. They may have a shift in knowledge, awareness, or understanding that affects how they see things and, ultimately, how they will act. What will they do differently next time? What decisions or opinions have they formed? How will the experience affect their career path, their personal life choices, or their use of new information, skills or technology?

Group Discussions

The groups may involve either the entire class or just small numbers of students. The instructor may allow students to choose their own group members, or he/she can set criteria for group composition (e.g., no groups composed of a single ethnicity or gender), or he/she can assign students to groups. The group members exchange ideas about the course topics and/or the service experiences. The instructor may either pose general or narrowly focused questions for discussion. A scribe may be assigned to submit a summary of the discussion to the instructor or to the rest of the class.

Analytic Papers

Analytic papers provide students with an opportunity to describe their service experience, to evaluate the experience and what they learned from it, and to integrate their experiences with course topics. If the papers are assigned at the end of the course, students can make use of ideas derived from class discussion, journals, and other reflective activities provided during the course. Papers may include traditional library research, interviews, or other quantitative and qualitative methods.

Portfolios and Notebooks

Students may be asked to compile materials relevant to the service-learning experience and the course of which it is a part. These materials may include journals, analytic papers, scripts/notes for class presentations, items created or collected as part of the service, pictures, agency brochures, handbooks, time-sheets, service agreement, and training materials. Portfolios provide a focus for reflection on the service experience and its documentation. Introductory letters or papers addressed to the reader can help students to discover meaning through writing.

Presentations

Students may be asked to make presentations to their classmates (and/or to broader audiences) describing their service-learning experiences, evaluating them and integrating them with the course topics. Community partners may be invited and/or students may present at the work site. Presentations may be videotaped to share with other audiences.

Reading Responses

Students may be asked to write responses to course readings, connecting them with service experiences. Students can be allowed greater or less freedom in how they respond, by posing either general or more focused questions.

Electronic Forum

Students may be asked to contribute to electronic discussion on service-learning and course topics using a listserv, discussion board, or blog. They may respond to questions posed by the instructor, to points raised by other students, or to readings posted on the site. They may prepare websites that document and reflect on their work. Remember, public discussions work best with formal rules of engagement and clear expectations for type, frequency, and content of postings.

Simulations and Role Playing

Students may problem-solve by acting out potential problems or issues at the worksite. Games can simulate challenging situations.

Letters

Students may write letters to community partners, parents, or other appropriate audiences to help them process their learning.

Engaging the Community

Enrich reflection activities by inviting community partners to participate in class reflection or to suggest topics. Ask partners to share in the teaching role by reflecting informally with service-learners on the site when the opportunity arises. Invite community partners into the classroom during the course to reflect on ongoing projects. Invite community partners into the classroom at the end of the course to reflect on the events of the semester. Meet with community partners after the semester is complete to reflect and discuss the service-learning partnership experience.

Step 9: Assess, Evaluate, and Disseminate At the end of the academic service-learning course faculty members should seek feedback from students and community partners about the course. Useful resource: *Assessing Service-Learning and Civic Engagement: Principles and Techniques* Campus Compact: 2001

- Use reflection assignments to assess student learning and evaluate performance.
- Evaluate analytical skills, communication skills, critical thinking, and judgment from students' reflection papers and presentations. Grading rubrics are useful to clarify your expectations.
- Create individual or group assignments that require students to integrate the course content and the service experience.
- While points may be provided for successfully completing the service contract and obtaining supervisor evaluation, the grade should be based upon rigorous assessment of student learning and skill application.
- Use the evaluations to plan and refine your next service-learning course.
- Share assessment results with community partners and the CCSL as appropriate.