

**Defining Service Learning** Service learning is a powerful tool that enhances learning by engaging students in relevant community service. It can be used to assist course-related learning and as a key strategy for fostering citizenship in a democratic society. Think of service learning as a way of bridging theory to practice, of taking classroom concepts and applying them to real-world situations. It is a way of linking civic engagement to the course curriculum.

Service learning is a form of experiential learning. Service learning programs are distinguished from other approaches to experiential education by their intention to equally benefit the provider and the recipient of the service as well as to ensure equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring. Student participants are given the opportunity to learn and develop as leaders through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet vital community needs. The service opportunities are coordinated in collaboration with the course curriculum and the service site.

The service learning philosophy provides structured time for students to think, talk, and write about what they experience during their service activity. This "reflection" provides students with a chance to see knowledge acting upon real situations in their own communities. This further enhances what is taught in class by extending learning beyond the classroom. Service learning helps foster the development of a sense of caring for others. It is also a means by which colleges and universities can promote the civic engagement of students.