

Service learning course development

According to Campus Compact, a national leader in building civic engagement into campus and academic life, in order for service learning to be effective and to minimize the potential for harm, service learning must be well planned and fully integrated into the course syllabus. The service component of the course must be clearly structured to provide a rationale for the service activity.

Engagement: Does the service component meet a public good? How do you know this? Has the community been consulted? How? How have campus-community boundaries been negotiated and how will they be crossed?

Reflection: Is there a mechanism that encourages students to link their service experience to course content and to reflect upon why the service is important? How is the reflection component implemented?

Reciprocity: Is reciprocity evident in the service component? How? Reciprocity suggests that every individual, organization, and entity involved in the service learning functions as both a teacher and a learner. Participants (students, community partners) are perceived as colleagues, not as servers and clients. (Jacoby, 1996 p.36)

Public Dissemination: Is service work presented to the public or made an opportunity for the community to enter into a public dialogue? For example: Do oral histories students collect return to the community in some public form? Is the data students collect on the saturation of toxins in the local river made public? How, and to whose advantage?

Once faculty have addressed these four principles, they should begin to plan the manner in which the service component will be presented in the syllabus. The presentation of service in the syllabus is critical in shaping the educational outcomes for the course. Service cannot be presented as a mere sidebar to the course; rather, the syllabus should explain why this kind of service is a part of the course.

This requires instructors to think about the explicit connections between their course and departmental objectives; between the university's mission and the community's expectations; and, perhaps most importantly, between their goals and their students expectations (Woolcock, 1997 p. 10). These connections are further clarified for students in how faculty structure the service component in the syllabus. This is most often evident in how faculty conceptualize the course within a specific service learning model.

Six Models of service learning

Whether creating a new course or reconstructing an existing course using service learning, faculty should explore the appropriate model of service learning. While one could argue that there are many models of service learning, we feel that service learning courses can basically be described in six categories:

1. "Pure" service learning

These are courses that send students into the community to serve. These courses have as their intellectual core the idea of service to communities by students, volunteers, or engaged citizens. They are not typically lodged in any one discipline.

2. Discipline-based service learning

In this model, students are expected to have a presence in the community throughout the semester and reflect on their experiences on a regular basis using course content as a basis for their analysis and understanding.

3. Problem-based service learning

According to this model, students (or teams of students) relate to the community much as "consultants" working for a "client." Students work with community members to understand a particular community problem or need. This model presumes that the students will have some knowledge they can draw upon to make recommendations to the community or develop a solution to the problem: architecture students might design a park; business students might develop a web site; or botany students might identify non-native plants and suggest eradication methods.

4. Capstone courses

These courses are generally designed for majors and minors in a given discipline and are offered almost exclusively to students in their final year. Capstone courses ask students to draw upon the knowledge they have obtained throughout their coursework and combine it with relevant service work in the community. The goal of capstone courses is usually either to explore a new topic or to synthesize students' understanding of their discipline. These courses offer an excellent way to help students make the transition from the world of theory to the world of practice by helping them establish professional contacts and gather personal experience.

5. Service internships

Like traditional internships, these experiences are more intense than typical service learning courses, with students working as many as 10 to 20 hours a week in a community setting. As in traditional internships, students are generally charged with producing a body of work that is of value to the community or site. However, unlike traditional internships, service internships have regular and ongoing reflective opportunities that help students analyze their new experiences using discipline-based theories. These reflective opportunities can be done with small groups of peers, with one-on-one meetings with faculty advisors, or even electronically with a faculty member providing feedback. Service

internships are further distinguished from traditional internships by their focus on reciprocity: the idea that the community and the student benefit equally from the experience.

6. Undergraduate community-based action research

A relatively new approach that is gaining popularity, community-based action research is similar to an independent study option for the rare student who is highly experienced in community work. Community-based action research can also be effective with small classes or groups of students. In this model, students work closely with faculty members to learn research methodology while serving as advocates for communities.

Excerpted from Hefferman, Kerrissa: Fundamentals of Service-Learning Course Construction. RI: Campus Compact, 2001, pp. 2-7, 9.