



Presents:

Fundamentals of Service-Learning Course Construction & Reflection

Dr. Kerrissa Heffernan
Brown University

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The Big Picture: Three Variables to Consider

1. Institutional Memory or Perspective

- What has the institutions' place been in the health and maintenance of local communities?
- What experiences have led to trust or distrust between the campus and the community?
- What has served as an impetus to reflect and change?
- What events have served to bond partners?
- What events have tested campus community relationships?

2. Organizational Literacy Within Institutional Culture (*the integrity of service-learning*)

- Who are the leaders at your institution? Can you describe what they do? To whom are they responsible?
- What's the level of buy-in from leadership for service-learning? Are they actively involved in promoting service on campus? How is that demonstrated? Are they active in any communities? In what capacity?
- How can you influence their commitment to service? If not you, who can?

3. Engendering Institutional Support

- What is the method the campus most often employs to respond to concerns? (centralized? decentralized?)
- Where is the community service center/office housed on campus?
- What types of service learning resources are available to faculty?

How to Structure the Service Component

Define the nature of the service and introduce a service model for the course.

For example:

- **Will students perform community-based action research, problem-based service-learning, or “pure service?”**

Why This Service Activity in this Course?

Define the service placement or project in the context of the course and the discipline.

Four Basic Principles for Organizing and Constructing a Service-Learning Course

1. 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?

2. 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?

3. Reciprocity

- Is reciprocity evident in the service component? How?
- Approximately to what extent?
- “Reciprocity suggests that every individual, organization, and entity involved in the service-learning functions as both a teacher and a learner. Participants are perceived as colleagues, not as servers and clients.” (Jacoby, 1996 p.36)

4. 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?
- Are the data students collect on the saturation of toxins in the local river made public? How?
- To whose advantage?

Types of Service-Learning

I. “Pure” Service-Learning

These are courses that send students out 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.

Example: **Service Learning 200: Introduction to Service in Multicultural Communities**
California State University at Monterey Bay

Course Focus: Youth and Elderly

Purpose: To prepare students for active and responsible community participation. To learn the skills, knowledge and competencies necessary for this type of participation, students will engage in an on-going process of service and reflection throughout the semester.

Community-Based Assignment: With faculty guidance, students will choose a service site that will allow them to learn about themselves and their community. For a minimum of three hours a week, for 10 weeks, students will be engaged in the work of a local community agency, school, or other organization. In addition to hands on work, time at the agency site will be spent observing, listening, and engaging in dialogue with community members.

One of the purposes of the community placement is to afford students direct experience in a community or sector of a community with which they do not have previous experience, and which they may have initially perceived as “other.” The topics this section will focus on are infants, children, young people and people who are elderly. Some course readings, class discussions and activities and all placements for this section will focus on these topics. Several community agencies have agreed to serve as site placements for this section. Students will have the opportunity to learn more about them from class discussions and from the Service Learning Placement catalog distributed the third week of September. Students will be able to meet with agency staff at the Placement Fair held September 20.

Time spent in the classroom and in the community is of equal importance.

Related Assignment: Weekly journal, three service learning projects (one per month) with related essays. Final group service presentation (to be designed by students in conjunction with faculty)

Challenges: Because service *is* the course content of pure service-learning, it is easier to build an intellectual connection between the course and the community experience. But pure service poses a danger in that the “content” of the course is service-learning, volunteerism, or civic engagement. It is not that these topics can’t be taught in intellectually defensive ways. Many of these courses use a multi-disciplinary approach to examine the philosophical, social, and intellectual underpinnings that support a movement or a historical/philosophical approach to a phenomenon like volunteerism. But all too frequently, detractors accuse these courses of being lightweight excuses to give students credit for service with a reflective component that is more conversational than analytical (all in the guise of an intellectual frame). As a result, faculty often view these courses with a great deal of skepticism. There is also a danger that such courses may serve to marginalize service-learning because faculty may be reluctant to envision a more rigorous or content-specific model.

II. 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 throughout the semester using course content as a basis for their analysis and understanding.

Example: History 252: Medieval Europe
 Sacred Heart College

Purpose: This course aims to study the development of a distinctly European Western civilization that emerged from the Mediterranean and Classical world as well as other northern “barbarian” tribes. We will seek to understand the development of a distinctly “western civilization” in Europe by (1) focusing on political, economic and religious institutions, (2) looking at the ideological and cultural system and the collective mentality, and (3) looking at a variety of people who inhabited these worlds. In the Medieval world each person had a fixed place in society, and entered their role through birth and “calling”: they had a duty to live in society in a certain way.

Community-Based Component: (A course option in place of a paper). You may do a student-teaching internship with sixth-graders at Winthrop School, Reed School or Moran School. Students will present units on the medieval world, work with reading skills, and design and run projects with the sixth graders.

Related Assignments: A written report of your experience (15 pages) is due at the end of the semester.

Challenges: Discipline-based courses are generally easier to defend intellectually. But the link between course content and community experience must be made very explicit to students. And the more explicit the link, the more one limits the types of appropriate community experiences. This can make placement logistics and monitoring difficult and frustrating. Perhaps because of this constraint, discipline-based courses are more apt to use service in lieu of another assignment, as extra credit, or as a fourth credit. This can present additional challenges to the reflective component as not all students in the course are engaged in service.

III. Problem-Based Service-Learning (PBSL)

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.

Example: Civil Engineering 571: Traffic Flow Theory
University of Utah

Purpose: Transportation studies encompass a wide range of disciplines. The Traffic Engineering Course has been designed to provide you with an insight into traffic control and management techniques.

Community-Based Component: Students in this class provide a needed service: The Millcreek Lions' Club and the county of Salt Lake have approached me requesting that I work with them to address traffic control problems in the Millcreek neighborhood. Traffic routed improperly has become a safety issue and has greatly contributed to the deterioration in the neighborhood especially for seniors and children. Too much traffic on neighborhood streets has cut off access by foot and isolated parts of the neighborhood from what used to be a more cohesive unit. Students will work with the community residents to understand the problems, then to design traffic solutions. Students will present their findings and solutions to the community and the county in public meetings and will get feedback from both as to how to continuously improve the project.

Related Assignments: In addition to collecting research and designing solutions (presented in a series of reports), students will write about how their designs have been influenced by community concerns.

Challenges: Problem-based service-learning attempts to circumvent many of the logistical problems faculty encounter by limiting the number of times that students go out into the community (students go into the community long enough to identify a problem and/or gather data). The rationale is that students are responsible for surveying communities and identifying specific needs. Students are then responsible for coordinating their own schedules to develop a product in response to these identified needs. There are two difficulties associated with this approach:

1. The limited exposure of the students to the community minimizes the likelihood that their solution will address the full magnitude of the problem.
2. There is a danger in promoting the idea that students are “experts” and communities are “clients.” This heightens the perception of many communities that universities are pejorative entities that promote insular ways of knowing and understanding the world.

IV. 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 course work and combine it with relevant service work in the community. The goal of capstone courses is usually either exploring a new topic or synthesizing students understanding of their discipline. These courses offer an excellent way to help students transition from the world of theory to the world of practice by helping them make professional contacts and gather personal experience.

Example: In Other Words: *The Women's Community Education Project*
Portland State University

Purpose: To design an outreach program to raise local teen girls' awareness of resources and activities at In Other Words and the Women's Community Education Project. To provide a space for teen girls to think, talk, and write about current issues in their lives.

Community-Based Component: Your primary task for this course is to make contacts with teen advocates in the Portland area and to conduct several rap sessions with teen girls, encourage them to participate in our project, solicit submissions, and design our 'zine. You will negotiate a secondary task applicable to our project. This task is an opportunity to use skills specific to your major and should reflect a personal interest in an issue related to teen girls or the bookstore.

Related Assignment: Portfolio, Capstone Plan, and proposal for group facilitation research reflective journal.

Challenges: Capstone courses place much of the responsibility for placement on the student. It is assumed that the senior year is an appropriate time for students to bring their skills and knowledge to bear on a community problem, developing new knowledge in the process. Capstone courses generally offer communities students with specific skills who can invest a significant amount of time in research and practice. The danger is that when students graduate and leave the community, they take with them valuable knowledge and insights that cannot be easily replaced.

V. 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 on-going 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.

Example: PSP 401: Public Service Practicum
 Providence College

Purpose: The Practicum is designed to prepare you to work as a Community Assistant for the Feinstein Institute for Public Service. The Practicum is also designed to develop and improve the practical skills that will help you to work effectively as liaisons between service-learning courses and the community-based organizations that operate as service sites in these courses.

Community-Based Component: The Practicum is a yearlong required course for the Public and Community Service Studies major. While the two semesters differ significantly in terms of course content and objectives, they complement each other. During the first semester your focus will be on developing a comprehensive knowledge of your site, the population it serves, and the neighborhood where it is located. You will be responsible for "managing" the service for the group of students assigned to your site. You will be asked to reflect upon your motivations, your intentions, and your impact in light of the relationships you develop over the course of the semester. During the second semester your focus will be on analyzing the relationship between the Feinstein Institute and your site and you will be asked to reflect upon and write about responsibility and impact at the institutional level. You will consider the history of the relationship between the Institute and the organization and be asked to make concrete recommendations regarding the advancement of the relationship in the future.

Related Assignments: Organizational action research, critical incident journal, grant application.

Challenges: Service Internships require students to produce a body of work that is of value to the community or to a specific community site. However, they generally require a level of oversight from the community partner that can be taxing. And, as with capstone courses, students graduate and leave the community site, taking with them valuable knowledge and insight that cannot be easily replaced.

VI. 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.

Example: *Economics 295 Regional Economic Development Practicum*
 Lehigh University

Purpose: This course will involve teams of students in community-oriented research projects. Students will participate in the design and execution of a specific research project identified by a Lehigh Valley development agency. The results of this research will be communicated both orally and in a written report to the agency.

Community-Based Component: Students may choose one of seven research projects identified by development agencies.

For example:

- Transportation Barriers to Successful Welfare to Work Transitions
- Community partner: Council of Hispanic Organizations

Students will assist the council by researching and documenting the extent to which women living in the inner city of Allentown are limited in their search for employment by the current configuration of bus routes. Student teams will meet with LANTA planners to identify ways in which routes could be changed or new services developed to enhance the possibility of successful transitions from welfare to work

Related assignments: Large research paper and presentation.

Challenges: Undergraduate community-based research shares many of the same pros and cons as traditional research-focused courses. This model assumes that students are competent in time management, are self-directed learners, and can negotiate diverse communities. These assumptions can become problematic and the ramifications of students' failures can impact the community.

Exemplary Service-Learning Syllabi

- Include service as an expressed goal
- Clearly describe *how* the service experience will be measured and *what* will be measured
- Provide a structure for lofty service rhetoric
- Describe the nature of the service placement and/or project
- Specify the roles and responsibilities of students in the placement and/or service project, (e.g., transportation, time requirements, community contacts, etc.)
- Define the need(s) the service placement meets
- Specify how students will be expected to demonstrate what they have learned in the placement/project (journal, papers, presentations)
- Present course assignments that link the service placement and the course content
- Include a description of the reflective process
- Include a description of the expectations for the public dissemination of students' work

Course Goals and Objectives

Goals are learning outcomes—broad statements identifying the general educational outcomes you want students to display upon completion of the course.

Objectives are the concrete measures by which goals will be realized and are usually expressed as relationships between specific concepts.

Examples

Course Objective: To encourage students to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of welfare policies in American society.

The problem with this combined goal/objective is that it does not clarify for students what learning outcome will be measured. A more coherent approach would be to break down this goal/objective into a goal and a corresponding objective.

Suggested revision:

Goal: To encourage students to think critically about current welfare policies in the United States.

Objective: Students will critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of social and economic theories and arguments that inform current welfare policies.

Dance 200: Objectives:

- 1. To provide opportunities for students to bridge university experiences to the community through service work.**
- 2. To provide information about and practical experience in working with dance in the community**
- 3. To provide a network of resources, people, and materials for linking dance to diverse community groups.**
- 4. To use community experience as a context for discussion and evaluation of individual and group projects.**

The objectives above are more accurately described as goals. But when they are presented as objectives, one is left to wonder *how* students will be evaluated. And as there are no goals listed prior to the objectives one is left to wonder: “*Why these?*” “*What’s the purpose of the objectives?*” and “*Why include a service component?*” When composing objectives, conceptualize them in a manner that reinforces the goals or outcomes you hope students will achieve.

Suggested revision:

Goal: To connect dance students to community arts organizations through service learning.

Objective: Students will identify and analyze organizations in Smallville that focus on dance.

A common mistake is focusing on process as opposed to product when creating objectives.

***Example:* “To demonstrate to students an appreciation for the immigrant experience.”**

This is not only a goal inaccurately expressed as an objective, but is conveyed in a manner that focuses on the instructor’s role (the teaching activity), not the student’s role (learning outcome).

Suggested revision:

Objectives:

- **Identify countries of origin and diverse ethnicities represented in the communities in which students serve**
- **Describe the steps involved in emigrating to the United States**
- **List common social, cultural and economic issues immigrants encounter upon arriving in the United States**
- **Demonstrate an understanding of skills needed to negotiate the US immigration system**

These four objectives clarify the initial goal of “***demonstrating an appreciation for the immigrant experience.***” They are tangible to students, but more importantly, they specify measurable learning outcomes (products) not just the teaching activity (process). By focusing on the learning outcomes, you will ultimately focus on the teaching activity; for the extent to which students achieve the course objectives is the extent to which they realize the goals of the course—and this is a measure of teaching effectiveness.

Formulating Course Goals and Objectives

The best way for faculty to begin formulating course goals and objectives in a service-learning course is by asking themselves:

- What educational outcomes do I want students to display upon completing this course?
- How can service-learning effectively help them attain that mastery?
- What student behavior will serve as evidence that this mastery has been achieved?

Suggestion

Faculty will be in a better position to evaluate learning outcomes if they begin their course objectives with *action verbs*. For example:

- *Identifies* populations at risk
- *Describes* the characteristics of the progressive era
- *Lists* social service organizations that address domestic violence
- *Contrasts* current welfare policies to current economic trends
- *Appreciates* the complexity of the Weikwa River ecosystem
- *Synthesizes* community histories
- *Evaluates* the effectiveness of current neighborhood literacy programs

Describing the Service Assignment

By
Richard Cone, Consultant
**(Former Executive Director, Joint Educational Project, College of Letters,
Arts and Sciences, University of Southern California)**

Many syllabi include additional materials for students that are specific to the service assignment. These related materials are often constructed as informational resources, student contracts, or “frequently asked questions.” The materials should alleviate the anxiety many students feel toward service by answering the following concerns:

- *Is the service optional or mandatory?*
- *If it is mandatory, what are the options for students who cannot fit community service into their schedule?*
- *Must they drop the course or are there some alternative paths?*
- *If it is optional, is the service extra credit?*
- *Does it work in lieu of a paper or some other requirement? Or is it merely an alternative way of gathering data for an end-of semester paper?*

Mandating Service

There is a continuing controversy about mandating service. Often, students and less knowledgeable colleagues will snicker at the notion of mandating volunteerism. I believe it is important to address those misconceptions. Service-learning is not forced labor; it is a pedagogy. Faculty who utilize it are utilizing an alternative mode of teaching and learning. Just as instructors should not have to explain why they require term papers or class projects, they should not have to justify student work in the community, as long as they can justify the learning that ensues.

- **How many hours of service are students required to complete? (How many hours per week for how many weeks?)**

If students are to make informed decisions, they must understand the commitment in relation to their other requirements. This becomes even more important as increasing numbers of students are working to cover the costs of higher education. When presenting the service component, the estimate should include service hours, transportation to and from the service placement, and an approximation of time needed for reflection.

- **What does the timeline for the semester look like? What is the deadline for finding a service site? When should community assignments be completed? When are assignments due?**

To the greatest extent possible, these elements should be integrated into the syllabus so that for any given week, students can see what course readings, service requirements, and assignments are due.

Specific Information About Service Placements

Faculty should include a section in the syllabus that addresses what type of service placements students will be expected to undertake.

- **Are students required to find their own placement and, if so, what requirements must a site meet to be an appropriate placement?**
- **Will students select a site off a list and, if so, how do they make an informed decision about which site might be best for them?**

If the course does require students to choose from a list of approved sites, the syllabus should include a brief description about the site/agency and the type of work that students will be doing. If there is an office on campus that will assist students in making the link with the service site, the syllabus must tell students how they can contact the office. This information is critical, not only in helping students initiate the placement process, but also in alleviating the fear that service can inspire in students.

If students must assume responsibility for finding their own site or a site off a list,

- **How do students go about informing their faculty member of their chosen site, their specific assignment, and the name and contact information of the person responsible for supervising their work?**

The syllabus should include any and all contracts or work agreements that students fill out with faculty and site supervisors. This allows the student, the faculty member, and the site supervisor to have copies and increases the likelihood that there is common understanding.

- **When must students begin?**

Create a firm deadline for getting situated. Remember “student time” is often unique. Students can and will take half of the semester getting located, resulting in little time for service and/or stacking service hours in the latter half of the semester thereby reducing the time available for reflection. With few exceptions, sixteen hours of experience in the community spread over eight weeks promises a better educational experience than sixteen hours done on two successive Saturdays. Moreover, goals and objectives depend upon the ability to measure steady progress over the course of the semester. Each trip to the community is an opportunity to provoke new thoughts, promote deeper understanding, and lead students toward the realization of course goals.

Example

Journal Entries

For Week 2:

Reading: Sara Mosle, "The Vanity of Volunteerism"

1. According to the author, why is it that volunteerism doesn't work?
2. In what ways is the author's experience as a volunteer similar to or different from your own?
 - If we accept the author's argument, what would have to change to make volunteerism "work"?

Reading: Nina Eliasoph, *Avoiding Politics*.

Based upon your experience in community service, in your home community, in your education, reflect upon the reading by addressing the following questions. Bring your written journal response to class.

1. What is the author's analysis?
2. In what ways is it consistent or inconsistent with your experience?
3. What relevance does it have for this course? (Consider the full dimensions of the course)

Class Dismissed!