



SERVICE-LEARNING AT TOWSON UNIVERSITY

A Resource for Faculty

What is Service-Learning?

Service-learning is a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development. Reflection and reciprocity are key concepts of service-learning (General definition of service-learning used by President Caret's Service-Learning Task Force, 2005).

What are the Criteria of a Service-Learning Course?

I. Meaningful Connection to Discipline

The service-learning experience is explicitly related to course content and discipline. Students are exposed to an array of diverse perspectives that exist beyond the confines of the university. A service-learning course should include a minimum of 15 hours of service to the community partner (CP).

II. Preparation

Faculty will prepare students for the service-learning experience. This preparation may include research on the mission of the community partner and/or the population to be served. Preparation will include a thorough explanation, also included in the syllabus, of service-learning expectations and requirements. In-class preparation will include discussion of the value of the service-learning experience.

III. Partnership and Reciprocity

The service project is mutually beneficial to the University and community partner as it meets an existing need for the CP and enhances student learning. The faculty member and CP agree upon project details and timelines prior to the start of the course. There should be a written agreement between the university and CP with course and project specific information, including project goals and any deliverables expected of students. The faculty member and CP should be in continuous contact throughout the semester to ensure that the needs of both parties are being met.

IV. Reflection

Meaningful and structured student reflection occurs throughout the service-learning experience. Through reflection students demonstrate an understanding of the connection between course content and the service-learning experience. Reflections may include journaling, discussions, presentations, periodic logs, and/or other forms as stipulated by the faculty member.

V. Assessment and Evaluation

Evaluation of the service project is included in the project plan and is completed by the CP, faculty member and students in order to determine the project's effectiveness in meeting stated goals. Community partners also assess student performance based on measures agreed upon with the faculty member. This assessment should be reflected in the grading matrix. Some form of evaluation should occur halfway through the project to allow time for improvements if necessary. Evaluations should be reviewed to make future improvements in the service-learning experience.

(Approved by the Service-Learning Subcommittee 12/08; updated 3/09)

3 components of a Service-Learning Course

Preparation

Through preparation students learn what to expect when working hands-on with a particular community partner. Students are given clear expectations for project participation, research the organization they will be working with and discuss the connection between the course subject matter and the service-learning project. Preparing students to work with diverse populations is also critical.

Participation

During participation students are actually engaged in and completing the service-learning project. The project is something that benefits the community partner and enhances student learning.

Reflection

Reflection provides students with the opportunity to think and reflect on their service-learning experience and is a critical component of an effective service-learning course.

Why do Service-Learning?

Benefits for Students:

- Positive effect on interpersonal development, the ability to work well with others, leadership and communications skills
- Positive effect on sense of social responsibility and citizenship skills
- Proven to enhance academic learning, when compared to similar courses that are not integrating service-learning
- Improves ability to apply what they have learned in "the real world"
- Stronger relationships with faculty than those who are not involved in service-learning
- Improves satisfaction with college experience
- More likely to graduate (proven in research studies)
- Propensity to continue service and practice active citizenship following graduation

Benefits for Faculty:

- Satisfaction with enhanced quality of student learning
- Able to create connections with community organizations and significantly impact the surrounding community
- Opportunities to develop scholarship related to community engagement
- Include in annual report for promotion and tenure
- Ability to demonstrate real world application of student learning

- Personal Satisfaction
- Contribute to the university's 2010 Strategic Plan and Mission

Benefits for the Community Partner:

- Student participation provides useful service
- Enhanced organizational capacity to achieve mission
- Organizations expose students to their mission and purpose, possibly creating a lasting interest in serving with the organization
- Enhanced relationship with the university

(Eyler, Janet S., Dwight E. Giles, Christine M. Stenson, and Charlene J. Gray. At a Glance: What We Know about The Effects of Service-Learning on College Students, Faculty, Institutions and Communities, 1993-2000. Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse. Vers. Third Edition. 31 Aug. 2001. Vanderbilt University. <<http://www.compact.org/resources/downloads/aag.pdf>>.)

What disciplines can service-learning be used in?

Service-learning can be incorporated into any discipline.

More information about developing service-learning courses in a variety of disciplines can be found on the T.U. service-learning website in "Service-Learning in the Disciplines." (www.towson.edu/studentaffairs/civicingagement/ServiceLearning.asp)

Examples of service-learning courses from the 2008-2009 Towson University Service-Learning Faculty Fellows cohort:

Foreign Language - *Advanced Spanish Composition; Lea Ramsdell*

Students work with the Center for Transnational Women's Issues to develop mentoring programs for Latina girls and women in middle school, high school and college. Students take part in the research, development and mentoring aspect of the project. They also volunteer with English as a Second Language programs at Dumbarton Middle School and a local high school, developing relationships with Latina students and their teachers. Students also take part in the data collection portion of the project, interviewing students, teachers and parents about the perceptions and needs of Latina girls in the education system. Students are required to write reflections in Spanish about each experience they have in the community. They discuss their experiences in class and write a report based on the collected data. The data is also distributed to the Spanish-speaking students, parents, and community partners.

Electronic Media & Film - *Audio Documentary; Elsa Lankford*

Students work with nonprofit agencies in downtown Baltimore to make audio documentaries. They interview members of the agencies as well as patrons of the nonprofits to gain a wider knowledge of downtown Baltimore and community needs. Students strengthen their research skills by developing appropriate interview questions as well as increase audio editing skills by recording outside of a studio, in the real world. Reflection occurs through class discussions as well as in a written paper which includes the students' process, what they learned, what went wrong, etc. The documentaries are shared with the community organizations at a premiere party.

Art Education - *Media and Techniques for Art Teachers: Elementary and Secondary; Kay Broadwater*

Education students work with the New Song Academy, a new initiative school in Baltimore City. Towson University students spend the first half of the semester preparing for a visit from the elementary/middle school students. They create art lesson and workshop plans. During the second half of the semester, approximately 50-60 children aged 8-14 come to campus from the New Song Academy. During these visitation sessions, TU students implement their lesson plans and engage the NSA students in art education. This service-learning project not only provides art education and teaching experience for the two groups of involved students, but aims to break down stereotypes and encourage urban youth to continue their education at the college level. Reflections include a weekly log as well as classroom discussions.

What should be included in the syllabus?

The syllabus is the student's first interaction with the service-learning experience. The project needs to be clearly explained in how it relates to the course work. Include an explanation of the following:

- Why this specific service project is part of the course
- The objective and goals of the project
- Connection between the service experience and course content
- If available, include required dates and directions, if students will need to drive to an off-campus site
- How students will reflect throughout the semester
- How the service-learning project is incorporated in the student's final grade

How do I develop a partnership?

The Towson University AmeriCorps*VISTA Service Learning Coordinator can help you find a community partner and determine the best fit for the course. Some different populations to work with include; youth, senior citizens, disabled, low income, LGBT, etc.

Throughout the project to ensure there isn't any miscommunication, keep in contact with the same person at the community partner. Be sure the community partner can handle the amount of the students enrolled in the class; and that the project is the right fit for the course and discipline. All preparations with the community partner should be made before the start of the semester.

How do I prepare students?

Students should be fully prepared for the service-learning experience before starting their project work. Explain the project in detail including how it relates to course study, the expected community impact, and, if relevant, possible future careers. Also include an explanation of the following:

Set Clear Expectations

- Set clear expectations, such as "arrive on time," "dress appropriately," etc.
- Clear understanding of the population students will be working with
- Clear project description – make sure students understand the tasks and any deliverables that they are responsible for
- Provide background information about, or have students research, the community organization they will be working with

How should students reflect?

Students can reflect in four main ways throughout the project:

Writing:

- Journals
- Essays
- Publications
- Reports

Speaking and Listening:

- Panel and group discussions
- Presentations
- Scenarios for discussion

Performing and Creative Arts

- Role playing/Acting
- Interviewing Classmates
- Mock trial
- Teaching
- Collage
- Drawing

Multimedia & Technology

- Tri fold Storyboard
- Scrapbook
- Video/Photo Essay
- Chat room
- Webpage design
- Class blogs

Questions for each part of the service-learning experience can be used with any reflection style:

Preparation (prior to actual project participation):

Why do you do service?

How do you define community?

Who determines what's best for the community?

What is the mission of the community organization?

How will you help achieve this mission?

Participation (throughout the project experience):

Describe what you did.

What did you see or observe while at your community partner site?

How did you feel about the experience?

Describe the people you met at the service site.

Name three things that stuck in your mind about the service experience.

Describe the atmosphere of the service site.
Describe some of your interactions. How did they make you feel?
How did the people's responses make you feel?
How did the service site make you feel?
What brings people to the service site (both people seeking service and the volunteers)?
Are "strangers" welcomed at the service site? Why or why not?
Describe what a typical day might be like for someone who uses the services of the organization you worked with.
How would you teach this course this differently if you were in charge?
What would you change about this organization if you were in charge?
What would you change about this service-learning course if you were the professor?
How would you run the community partner differently if you were in charge?
What was the best/worst/most challenging thing that happened?
Did you feel like a part of the community you were working in?

Reflection (throughout and upon completion of the project):

What connections do you find between the experience and your course readings or lectures?
What new ideas or insights did you gain?
What skills did you use or strengthen through working with your community partner?
What knowledge or skills did you learn from this experience that you will apply in the future?
How are you different after completing your service project compared to the beginning of the course?
How are you similar/different to others (others in your service group? others seeking services? etc.)?
In what ways did your differences help/hinder the group?
What have you learned about yourself?
If you were one of the people receiving services, what would you think of yourself?
How does this experience compare to other service experiences you have had?
How does this course compare to other courses you have taken?
What connections do you see between this experience and what you've learned in your college courses?
How has your service contributed to your growth in any of these areas: civic responsibility, political consciousness, professional development, spiritual fulfillment, social understanding, and intellectual pursuit?
What have you learned about a particular community or societal issue?
How did this experience challenge your assumptions and stereotypes?
Do you think these people (or situations) are unique? Why or why not?
What public policies are involved in this area of service and what are their implications? How can they be improved?
Describe an internal or external conflict that has surfaced for you during your service work. Explain the factors that contribute to it and how you might resolve or cope with the conflict.
Discuss a social problem that you have come in contact with during your service work. What do you think are the root causes of this problem? Explain how your service may or may not contribute to its alleviation.
What could our class do to address the problems encountered in our service experiences?
What could each participant do on his/her own?
How can society better deal with the problem?

How can this experience apply to other situations in your life?
How can your solutions apply to other situations in your life?
How can your solutions apply to other problem(s) of other groups?
How can society be more compassionate/informed/involved regarding this community?
What is the difference between generosity, charity, justice, and social change?
Where do we go from here? What's the next step?

Finally, feel free to create your own reflection questions based on the goals of your particular course and service-learning project.

How can service-learning be incorporated in student grades?

Reflection:

Reflection is graded mostly by completion. The 2008-2009 Service-Learning Faculty Fellows found that a check, check plus, check minus grading system worked well. They graded based on completeness, the level of thought portrayed in the writing and detail about the service-learning experience.

Service Participation:

At minimum, a verification of student participation should be required to give students participation credit. Community partners are able to verify student service hours. Some faculty also incorporate feedback from community partners about individual student performance in final grades. While community partners should not directly grade student work, their feedback can be incorporated by the faculty member in determining student grades for the service-learning project.

Student evaluation forms for community partners can be found on the TU service-learning web site (www.towson.edu/studentaffairs/civicingagement/ServiceLearning.asp).