SPRING
service-learning network
Southwestern PA Regional Network for Growth of Service-Learning

SERVICE-LEARNING COURSE PLANNING TOOLKIT

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of this toolkit is to help higher education faculty and instructors to plan their service-learning courses. It presents a sequence of critical planning steps in building an effective course and can be used to design new courses or to revise existing ones. Feel free to share this guide and its associated resources with colleagues.   Well-designed service-learning courses strengthen student understanding of core academic concepts while simultaneously meeting community needs.

The general steps outlined here include:
✓ Determine your course learning objectives
✓ Decide if service-learning activities will enhance your students' learning outcomes
✓ Craft solid community partnerships
✓ Choose the service-learning class model that best fits your objectives
✓ Design appropriate reflective assignments and grading rubrics
✓ Create a means of evaluation… then share the results
✓ Plan for sustainability

A DEFINITION

Service-learning is an educational method, in which students perform meaningful service to meet community-identified needs while reflecting on their actions in a way that allows them to better understand course concepts, the role their discipline plays in society, and their civic identity. (Modified from Bringle and Hatcher, 1995).

For more discussion on defining service-learning:
National Service-Learning Clearinghouse
http://www.servicelearning.org/welcome_to_service-learning/service-learning_is/index.php

A TYPOLOGY

In a service-learning model, one can conceptualize the service project as a course text. Student participation in the service therefore is much like their reading of a chapter for class.   It is an essential point of inquiry for exploring course concepts, delving deeper into the complexity of issues and applying new knowledge to the world outside the classroom.

In some models, one or the other of the two key elements in this educational methodology is stronger than the other. In a strong course, both will be equal and they will be linked by reflection. Some examples of strong models:

- A marketing class develops a product and associated plan for a small non-profit organization
- A writing class helps develop brochures and web content for a neighborhood youth center
- An ecology class measures toxins in the local rivers in partnership with a neighboring high school and prepares a report to give to city government and advocacy agencies

SERVICE learning Service outcomes primary; learning goals secondary	**SERVICE-LEARNING** Service and learning goals of equal weight and each enhances the other for all participants
service learning Service and learning goals completely separate	**service LEARNING** Learning goals primary; service outcomes secondary

(Sigmon, 1994)

CRITICAL COMPONENTS OF SERVICE-LEARNING COURSE DESIGN

Planning & Logistics

Before you begin, take a moment to think about the time you have to devote to course planning and logistics. Elements to consider:
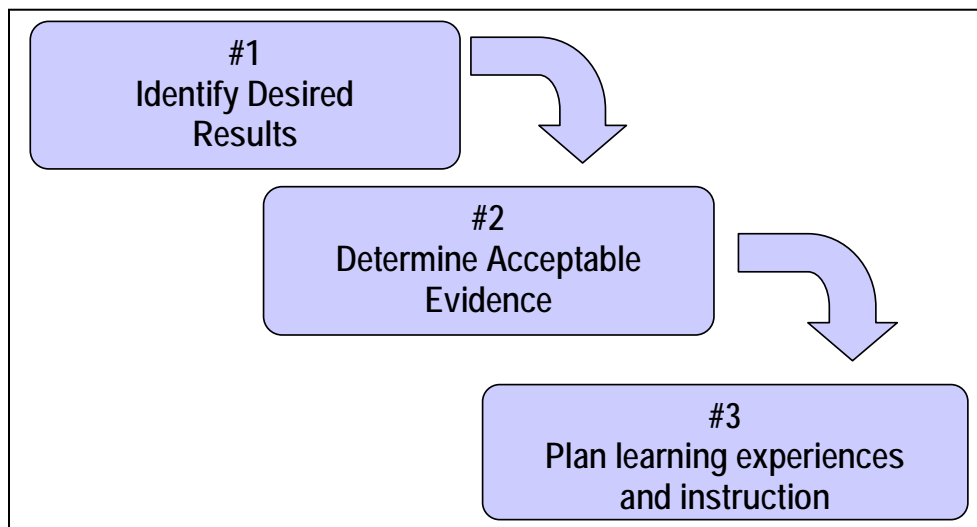- ✓ How will the service experience strengthen your course?
- ✓ Does your campus have an Office of Service-Learning or Volunteer Office that can support implementation of the logistics of your course?
- ✓ Do you have time to meet with community partners and check-in with them throughout the semester?
- ✓ What will the transportation needs be and how can you arrange for them?
- ✓ Will you need funding to implement any of the course components? Are there any sources available in your community or on campus?
- ✓ What support do you have from your department, school or overall institution?

Academic Coursework

The first component to think about in planning a service-learning course is the learning objectives of the course. What do you want your students to learn both in terms of course content and in terms of skills? For example, you might want them to learn about the history of race relations in the U.S. as well as learn how to think critically, present logical arguments, develop public speaking skills and hone their writing technique.

How would a service component enhance your course learning goals? What would the ideal service project be in relation to the class content? In the above example, perhaps you would want students to volunteer with organizations that promote racial justice. Or maybe you would want them to serve in community organizations that serve various ethnic groups. For assignments, perhaps you would want them to keep a journal, write essays, take an exam and present their experiences to the class in order to build their skills.

The "backwards design" model is a good way of approaching this process (Wiggins & McTighe, 2001).

#1 Identify Desired Results

#2 Determine Acceptable Evidence

#3 Plan learning experiences and instruction

Community Partnership

Once you have determined learning objectives, it's time to investigate community partnerships that will provide a mutual benefit for your students as well as the organization or population you will serve.

Reciprocity is a critical element in cultivating a community partnership. Good partnerships require a mentality of mutuality, parity and shared control and expertise. Community partners may feel like they can't say "no" to a request from a university expert. Focus on their unique expertise in their field and how this will enrich your student learning objectives. Be sure to recognize the time and energy it will take on their part to incorporate your students into their organization and plan accordingly. Ask the question: "What do you want to see happen?" so you can best plan for and meet expectations.

Four simple steps to keep in mind while developing partnerships (Winer & Ray, 1994):
- ✓ Assemble People
- ✓ Build Trust
- ✓ Create a Vision
- ✓ Specify Results

Some examples of partnership models:

1) Students volunteer within the existing structure of an agency
   o Child developmental psychology students volunteer with youth through a mentoring organization
2) Students work with a community partner to design a specific service project related to the course concepts and skills
   o Students in a documentary videography course produce a 10 minute promotional video for a local arts agency
3) Students in one course volunteer with a variety of partners
   o Pharmacy student teams give presentations on drugs of abuse to local high schools
   o Students in a writing course volunteer with various local non-profit agencies to write text for the organizations
4) Students conduct research and produce reports for partners
   o Business students conduct a marketing analysis and present strategies to the agency

When meeting with the community partner for the first time, the following Tip Sheet (Witchger-Hansen and White, 2004) may provide some helpful hints on important elements of the collaboration to discuss.

Tip Sheet for Meeting with Community Partners

What you need to communicate to the Community Partner:

What is Service-Learning?
- Provide a clear definition of service-learning, in particular, one that will help the community partner understand their role in service-learning
- Provide examples of other courses which incorporate Service-Learning at Duquesne University or at other institutions in your field.
- Help the agency to understand the differences between service-learning and community service.
- Emphasize the intent of a collaborative relationship, where both the university and community partners' needs are met.

What is your course?
- If this is an existing course that is being reworked to include a service-learning component, take a copy of your previous syllabus.
- If this is a new course, do some preliminary work, particularly on the academic concepts you hope students will gain through service-learning.

Questions to consider when meeting:

Readiness of the agency for a service-learning partnership and starter questions:
- What experience does the community partner have in working with college students?
- Is someone in the agency willing to be a champion for service-learning?
- What is the most important reason for involving students in service-learning through this organization?
- What are the major challenges the agency faces in providing services to the community?
- Does the agency see college students as a valuable resource?
- How much supervision will the agency be able to provide students?
- How readily could students apply what they would do in the agency to what they are learning in the classroom?
- How willing is the agency to provide time for staff to meet with faculty and attend service-learning training?
- Does the agency's schedule have flexibility to meet student's need?

Initial Meeting To-Do List:
- Discuss community and university mission & goals
- Explore community and university assets and needs
- Brainstorm project to address mutual needs and desired outcomes
- Consider short-term project to begin building trusting relationship

Project Development:
- Over time, determine scope of project based on mutually identified needs
- Develop shared mission statement & goals for project
- Establish effective on-going communication & evaluation plan
- Determine roles and responsibilities
- Set next steps & time line

Reflection

Reflecting on the service experience and how it relates to course concepts and civic engagement is essential to service-learning. Without reflective activities, students may not develop essential critical thinking skills or explore the complexities of community life in enough depth. In addition, negative stereotypes may be reinforced.

When designing reflection activities, ensure that they are continuous, connected, challenging & contextualized (Eyler, Giles, & Schmiede, 1996). Reflect via legitimate academic means such as research papers, essays, class discussion and presentations. You may also consider using an online forum where students can respond to each other through postings.

Students may find sharing their personal experiences and thoughts unfamiliar in an academic setting. Eliminate the confusion & increase student buy-in:
- ✓ Fully explain the importance of specific reflection activities
- ✓ Provide examples of acceptable work
- ✓ Provide a grading rubric for reflection activities

Include learning objectives for reflection activities such as:
- ✓ "Students will demonstrate an understanding of the intricate assets and needs present within a community"
- ✓ "Students will apply critical thinking abilities to complex problems"
- ✓ "Through written and oral assignments, students will present diverse viewpoints and critiques"

Sample Forms of Reflection

Speaking:	Writing:
• One-on-one conferences with the teacher/leader • Class/group discussions • Small group discussion • Oral reports to group • Discussions with community members or experts on an issue • Public speaking on project • Teach material to younger student	• Essay, expert paper, research paper, final paper • Project report • Learning log – kept daily, weekly, or after each service experience • Guide for future volunteers/participants • Self-evaluation or evaluation of program • Newspaper, magazine, and other published articles
Activities:	**Multimedia/ Performing Arts:**
• Analysis and problem solving • Information gathering needed to serve or understand project • Planning new future projects • Allocating program budget • Recruiting peers to serve • Recognition and celebration programs • Simulation or role-playing games • Training other students and/or program leaders	• Photo, slide show • Scrapbook • Interactive computers • Paintings, drawings, or collages • Dance, music or theater presentations • CD Rom Products • Website Development

(Cairn & Coble 1993).

Celebration

You may want to acknowledge the service work of the students as well as the commitment and support of the community partners.

Final celebration events can include a social gathering where people share reflective thoughts and make connections for continued relationships. If students have produced projects or products for a partner, a forum can be held in which they share their work and receive feedback.

Ask community partners how they would like to celebrate and involve them in the planning. Invite members of the broader community to learn about the service-learning course.

Some creative examples of service-learning celebration:
- Invite children who have been tutored to the campus for a day of learning about college
- Have students present the experience to local foundation community representatives
- If students wrote essays, poems or creative journal entries, share them with the agency and community members through an open mic event

Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment in a service-learning course can and should acknowledge the unique ways students are incorporating their experiences into their conceptual understanding of the course topic as well as into other areas of their life. You may want to plan for measuring changes in their career goals, sensitivity to diversity, communication skills, professionalism and their understanding of their role as citizens. Consider using a pre and post evaluation tool to capture changes in these dimensions.

Service-learning literature has presented the following concept as a tool for assessing reflection:
- **What?** Students explain their service experiences in descriptive terms. Ideally, they capture the complexity and richness of the situation.
- **So What?** Students develop critical thinking and analytical skills and gain insight about how their service experience relates to their life.
- **Now What?** Students take action based on the insights they have gained.

Rubrics are helpful in giving students clear guidelines for the quality you expect in written and oral communication. You can use them for papers, presentations, discussion and reflection. If you use a rubric for grading reflective discussion and writing, make sure to clarify that you are not grading opinions and viewpoints but rather the presentation style and analysis.

Evaluation & Sustainability

Ensure mechanisms are in place for evaluation of the course. If your university conducts a standard course evaluation, make sure to add questions that will gather data on the service-learning and reflection components of the course. Demonstrating outcomes and analyzing the impact of service-learning can become critical for sustaining service-learning courses on campus. An overview of some of the research on outcomes of service-learning has been conducted by Eyler, Giles, Stenson and Gray (2001) and can be found at: http://www.servicelearning.org/filemanager/download/4192_AtAGlance.pdf.

As the course concludes, give thought to the sustainability of this initiative. Some questions to consider might include the following.

Community Partners
➢ How will you share the final papers and products of the course with the community partner? Will it be a public event and if so, when will you hold it?
➢ How will you collect feedback from the community partner for future course modifications and planning?
➢ If the community partner would like continued student volunteers, can you help link them to other service-learning faculty or campus support?

Students
➢ How will students translate their service experience to others?
➢ How will they incorporate it into future decision-making and choices?
➢ Final reflective assignments can address these topics.

Course
➢ Will you be able to offer the course again and if so, will you work with the same community partner?
➢ If you can not continue the course, are their other interested faculty members who may want to teach the course?
➢ How have you demonstrated the effects of service-learning to your department?

University
➢ How engaged with service-learning is your university?
➢ How can you contribute to institutional sustainability and support for service-learning?

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