
SUNY Potsdam - Service-Learning Task Force

Service-Learning Course Designation Criteria and Process

After careful study, the following was developed by the Service-Learning Task Force, exemplifying the following definitions of service-learning:

“Service-learning is a credit-bearing, educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.”

- Robert Bringle and Julie Hatcher, “A Service Learning Curriculum for Faculty.” *The Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*. Fall 1995. 112-122.

Service-learning is “an academic program based on the engagement with underserved groups or organizations and projects focused on the common good; structured reflections on service-related as well as discipline specific concerns; and respect for the needs and interests of the community partner.”

- Edward Zlotkowski, Senior Associate for Service-Learning Projects at AAHE, Senior faculty Fellow at Campus Compact.

Service-Learning Course Criteria

1. Service Component

- a) Students in the class provide a service to individuals, organizations, schools or other entities in the community. The experience provides the community partners with useful service which can either be direct service or project based (e.g., tutoring, enrichment lessons, health education, research, report writing, collecting donations) as distinct from mere observation.
- b) Community partners define their needs and are included in planning for the service.
- c) Knowledge from the discipline informs the service experiences with which the students are involved.
- d) The faculty member becomes acquainted with each community partner that students are placed with, understanding the agency mission, clientele, location, and student role.
- e) The service opportunities are aimed at the development of the civic education of students even though they may also be focused on career preparation.
- f) Preparation for the service addresses student training, clarification of responsibilities and risk management issues. Responsibility and professionalism at the site are key issues to address prior to the service being delivered. Potential ethical issues should be considered as well as how they should be addressed.
- g) It is recommended that students are involved in at least four hours of service in the community for each hour of credit they receive for the course (12 hours for a 3-credit course) service that takes place over several periods is preferred but one time service learning projects are practiced at several institutions, the key ultimately is the reflection on the service.
- h) Course options ensure that no student is required to participate in a service placement that creates a religious, political and/or moral conflict for the student.

2. Curricular Component

- a) The syllabus is developed or revised to incorporate the service experience into the teaching and learning objectives of the course.
- b) The service experience is connected to the course through class activities and/or assignments such as readings, projects and class discussions and presentations.

- c) Reflection on the service experience is systematic and on-going and ensures that students analyze their community service experiences and can synthesize them with their academic studies. This ideally will include dialogue about community issues and the role of service.
- d) The class offers a way to learn from other class members and community partners as well as from the instructor.

3. Evaluation Component

- a) Students, faculty and community partners participate in the evaluation process.
- b) The course offers a method to assess the learning derived from the service. Academic credit is awarded for the learning gained from the experience and its relation to the course, not for the service itself.
- c) Communication with the community partner about your students' performance and the needs of the agency need to be addressed.

Note: Service-Learning Internships

The above criteria are designed for traditional courses, but may be applied to internships that fulfill the spirit of the criteria as reflected in the learning contract. Service-learning internships are distinguished from traditional internships by their focus on reciprocity in that community and student benefit equally from the experience. In this case students will follow the traditional internship experience.

Service-Learning Course Approval Process

The Curriculum Committee of the Service-Learning Advisory Board will review syllabi and proposals for service-learning classes. Please submit:

1. A completed course proposal application;
2. A general description of the class;
3. A point-by-point description of how the course meets the three components of the designation criteria as outlined in the current SL designation guidelines document;
4. A copy of the course syllabus;
5. Signature of the department chair;
6. Signature of the school dean.

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These criteria reflect "Principles of Good Practice for Service-Learning Pedagogy" excerpted from Howard, Jeffery, ed., *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning: Service-Learning Course Design Workbook*, University of Michigan: OCSL Press, Summer 2001, pp. 16-19 This document draws on Campus Compact's *Essential Service-Learning Resources* and similar documents from Colorado State University's Service Integration project, the University of Utah's Lowell Bennion Community Service Center, California State University-Northridge's Center for Community Service-Learning, Virginia Commonwealth University's Office of Community Programs, Skidmore College.
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