

SERVICE-LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Kerrissa Heffernan
National Campus Compact
Brown University

Service-learning is a reflective, relational, pedagogy that combines community or public service with structured opportunities for learning. Service-learning is premised on experiential education as the foundation for intellectual, moral, and civic growth. This focus on the synergy of the intellectual, moral, and civic dimensions of learning distinguishes service-learning from other forms of experiential education. Rather than focusing on preparing students for a particular job, service prepares students for practical community-based problem solving. It offers students an opportunity to explore the connections between the theoretical realm of the classroom and the practical needs of the community. As such, service-learning is inherently linked to a civic purpose reinforcing the skills of critical thinking, public discourse, collective activity, and community building. Moreover, because service is occurring in the context of an educational setting, faculty can ask students to reflect upon their service experience in relation to particular community principles, civic ideals, universal virtues, and their relationship to course content. Perhaps the most important benefit of service-learning is the motivation and opportunity it can provide for students to connect to a community and identify their civic role in that community.

Service-learning pedagogy challenges faculty to reconceptualize not only their curriculum, but also their disciplinary training and their role as educators. Initially, many faculty relate that it was difficult to relinquish the comfortable and predictable nature of classroom work and they found service-learning unpredictable and as such, uncomfortable. But inevitably faculty report that the unpredictable nature of service created a more authentic learning environment, one that was both energizing and motivating to students and faculty. Service challenges faculty and students on multiple levels as it incorporates shifting dialogues, and actively engage issues of equity, difference, inclusion, access, justice, and power.

Adopting service-learning pedagogy often surfaces issues related to faculty roles and rewards and the connection of the faculty role to that of the institutional mission and the needs of the wider society. Surveys indicate that faculty identified the following as the three

greatest obstacles to incorporating service into their coursework:

- Time and pressures (inflexibility) of teaching load.
- Resistance from faculty (and discipline) to curricular changes.
- Lack of support for faculty at the institutional level.

In the context of increasing demands on faculty and the limitations of their institutional role defined by disciplinary boundaries, departmental fragmentation, reward structures narrowly biased toward scholarship, and academic professionalism that is increasingly insular, many faculty express a sense of powerlessness on campus. That sense of powerlessness comes in part from the isolation of privatized work, the disengagement of expertise, and a culture of discourse built on argument.

Part of one's reconceptualized role that can address issues of powerlessness is to move faculty work toward connection and agency. This requires faculty and administrators to examine strategies for moving from a culture of privatized work to that of collective work, both departmentally and across the institution. It also requires connecting professional expertise to public discourse for wider civic engagement and as a way of approaching the construction of knowledge. Finally, allowing students and others – whether faculty on campus or partners in the community – to become part of the process of constructing knowledge requires shifting from a culture of argument to a culture of dialogue, fostering engagement, critical thinking, and a cultivation of agency. Moving toward a reflective pedagogy that is student-centered, community-based, and experiential, fundamentally redefines the faculty role on campus.

Service-learning as an epistemology and as pedagogy “de-centers” the classroom and intentionally places community in the center of the learning process. In doing so faculty acknowledges that educational design is critical to engagement, and that the construction of knowledge is directly related to how we utilize

knowledge in reasoning. Furthermore, service as academic work accepts that cognitive, affective, and moral growth are inseparable; that a student's ability to analyze situations and material is critical to their ability to make responsible decisions outside the classroom. These skills and experiences are critical to participatory citizenship for in both civic and intellectual life one must consistently reflect on their position, reconcile their preconceptions with the lived experiences of others, and uphold an ethic of personal accountability and social responsibility.

The way service-learning develops on your campus will differ in many respects from how it emerges on another campus. Its qualities will be shaped in large part by the broader institutional identity and the degree to which that identity is tied to a wider sense of social responsibility. It will develop according to the characteristics of the academic culture on your campus and the degree to which it values community-based education, definitions of scholarship, and professional service aimed toward outreach and public purpose. In some cases the institutionalization of service-learning will be determined by the role of a few faculty who act as agents for institutional transformation.

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF COURSE CONSTRUCTION

To be truly effective and to minimize that potential for harm, service-learning must be well planned and integrated into the course with a clear sense of how and why the placement or service activity is being utilized and its relationship to the course content:

- *How service:* Define the nature of service, what service model will the course utilize; e.g., community-based action research? Problem-based service? "Pure" service? A capstone or portfolio model of service?
- *Why service:* Course materials should define the service placement or project in the context of the discipline (A practical approach is to regard the service component like a seminal course text).

This type of pedagogical reflection requires the instructor to think about the explicit connections between the course and the departmental objectives; between the universities mission and the communities expectations; and between the stated goals of the course and the students' expectations. Good service-learning construction (the placement and supporting materials) clearly articulates why service is being used and how service informs stated learning goals, thus

demonstrating the academic integrity of service-learning and asserting the "rigor of service."

MODELS OF SERVICE-LEARNING

Whether faculty are creating a new course or reconstructing an existing course utilizing service-learning, they must choose an appropriate model of service-learning. While the field has moved far from the rudimentary debate of head versus heart, elements of that dilemma still surface when choosing appropriate service models. One end of the continuum argues for pristine models that breed "pure" service-learning courses. These pure courses focus on the service and adhere to a specific set of service-learning requirements. The other end argues that service-learning ought to be included at any point and are comfortable tacking on a service component to almost any course no matter how spacious the intellectual connection between the service and course content.

As is generally the case, the safest road is somewhere in the middle between the extremes. While there should be standards that guide faculty through the classroom-community connection there must also be room for risk, creativity, and exploration.

While there are a number of models of service-learning, most service-learning experiences can be described in the following five categories:

"Pure" Service-Learning - These are courses that not only send students out into the community to serve but 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.

Discipline-Based Service-Learning Courses - 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.

Problem-Based Service-Learning Courses - According to this model, students or teams of students respond to the community much as "consultants" working for a "client." Students work with community members to understand a particular community problem or need. It is presumed that the students will have some knowledge they can draw upon to make some recommendations to the community or to develop a solution. Architecture students might design a

park. Business students might develop a web site. Botanists might identify non-native plants and suggest eradication methods.

Capstone Courses - These courses are generally designed for majors and minors in a given discipline. As capstone courses they are offered exclusively to seniors or exceptional juniors. They ask students to draw upon the knowledge they have obtained throughout their course work and combine it with relevant service work in the community with the goal of exploring some new topic or to synthesize their understanding of the discipline. These courses offer an excellent way to help students transition between the world of theory and the world of practice while helping student make professional contacts and gather personal experience.

Service Internships - Like traditional internships, these experiences are more intense than typical service-learning experiences with students working as much 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. Unlike traditional internships, these internship programs have regular and on-going reflective opportunities that help involved 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. And unlike traditional internships these internships focus on reciprocity – the community and the student benefit equally from the experience.

Undergraduate community-based action research – A relatively new approach gaining popularity, community-based action research is similar to an independent study option for the rare student who is highly experienced in community work. In this model students can work closely with faculty members and learn research methodology while continuing to serve as advocates for communities and the issues of importance to communities.

The vast majority of service-learning courses fall into the first three categories - pure, discipline-based, and problem-based. All three have their strengths and weaknesses. Because service *is* the course content, pure service-learning courses encounter fewer difficulties building 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 multidisciplinary 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, these courses are accused of being “lightweight” excuses to give students credit for service with a reflective component that is suspect as being more conversation than analysis (all in the guise of an intellectual frame). As a result, these courses are often received with a great deal of skepticism by faculty. 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 – a service model they could embrace and adapt to their own courses.

Discipline-based service-learning courses are generally, more easy to defend intellectually, but the link between course content and community experience must be very explicit. But the more explicit the link, the more one risks limiting the types of appropriate community experiences. This can make the placement more time consuming for faculty, the logistics and monitoring more difficult and more frustrating.

Problem-based service-learning courses attempt to circumvent many of the logistical problems by limiting the number of times that students have to go out into the community. The rationale is that students are responsible for surveying communities and identify specific needs. Students are also responsible for coordinating their own schedule to develop a response to the expressed needs. There are two difficulties associated with this approach:

- The limited exposure of the students to the actual working situation and conditions of the community minimizes the likelihood that the students “solution” will address the full magnitude of the problem.
- There is a danger in the promoting the idea that students are “experts” and communities are “clients.” This underscores the cynicism many communities feel toward universities as pejorative entities that promote an insular ways of knowing and understanding the world.

Capstone courses simply place much the organizational onus for the placement on the student. It is assumed that the senior year is an appropriate time in which students can bring their skills and knowledge to bear on

a community problem and in the process develop new knowledge. Capstone courses generally offer communities students with specific skills who can invest a significant amount of time in research and practice. The danger is students graduate and leave the community site taking with them valuable knowledge and insights that cannot be easily replicated.

Undergraduate community-based research courses share many of the pluses and minuses of a traditional independent study. The model assumes that students are competent in time management, are self-directed learners, and can negotiate different communities. These same assumptions can become problematic and the ramifications for student's failure can impact the community.

Before choosing a model and constructing a service-learning course faculty should first reflect upon some fundamental questions surrounding teaching and learning that lie at the core of service-learning:

- **Theory:**
Do you approach your discipline from a particular theoretical perspective?
How is that evidenced in their teaching?
How would you reconcile and integrate service-learning with that perspective?
- **Pedagogy:**
How would utilizing service-learning enhance a student's learning experience in your course?
What are 2-3 outcomes you think service could provide for students in your course?
Does your institution value a particular mode of teaching? How would service-learning be perceived within that model?
- **Community Partnerships:**
What is the nature of campus-community partnerships at your institution? Who on your campus is doing community-based work?
What have been your own experiences with community work? Collaborative work?
What would be the nature of a community partnership that could address the pedagogical goals of your course(s)?
What community sites do you feel would best be suited to meet those goals? How might your course goals intersect with the goals of the community organization?
- **Reflection:**
How would you define reflection in your disciplinary construct? Your course?

In what way would reflection serve as an assessment tool for your course goals? How might you evaluate reflection?

Who would facilitate reflection and how?

What role might the community partner play in the reflection process?

- **Academic Culture:**
Where is service located at your institution? Co-curricular? Curricular? Both?
To whom might you turn for assistance in developing community partnerships?
- **Student Development:**
How will you ascertain the appropriate placement for the students in your course?
How will you prepare students for the experience?
- **Assessment:**
What assessment methods do you currently utilize in your courses?
How will you assess/evaluate student outcomes in service-learning? What outcomes will you evaluate?
How will you know if the desired outcome that drove the design and implementation of the service-learning component was achieved? (What outcomes do you want to measure? What is the purpose of generating this information? What would constitute a successful service-learning experience?)
- **Curriculum Development:**
What could your students contribute to the community? What could a community experience offer your students?
Where would service be located in your course? What are the logistical challenges you anticipate with this model?
What significant changes do you anticipate will occur in your course as a result of incorporating service-learning? In your teaching methodology?
- **Promotion and Tenure:**
Where is/would service-learning be located in the reward structure of your institution? (In what areas might service fall? e.g., scholarship, research, professional development, public outreach?) Does your institution support community-based scholarship? How is that evidenced?

TRANSFORMING THE ACADEMY

Service-learning is a powerful pedagogy of engagement that extends beyond methods of teaching and learning,

recognizing that democracy is a learned activity and that active participation in the life of a community is a bridge to citizenship. Service-learning has the potential to be a bridge to civic education as it surfaces a broader vision of an engaged campus. A campus that is centrally engaged in the life of its local communities reorients the core missions of academia - teaching, scholarship, and service - around community transformation.

- Pedagogy is transformed to that of engaged teaching, connecting structured student activities in community work with academic study, decentering the teacher as the singular authority of knowledge, incorporating a reflective teaching methodology, and shifting the model of education, to use Freire's distinctions, from "banking" to "dialogue."
- Scholarship of engagement is oriented toward community-based action research that addresses issues defined by community participants and that includes students in the process of inquiry.
- Service is expanded beyond the confines of department and college committees and professional associations to the offering of one's professional expertise to addressing community-defined concerns.

If the possibility of wider democratic practice is to be more than a reorientation of professional culture, the engaged campus must extend beyond the academic mission of the university to its institutional structure and organization – engagement compels institutional change. Reciprocal, long-term relationships in local communities require institutional structures to connect the campus to the community. Faculty roles need to be redefined, as does the reward structure, to acknowledge, validate, and encourage a shift in teaching, scholarship, and service toward community engagement. Additionally, traditional divisions on campus between student affairs and academic affairs, between disciplines and departments, need to be broken down to encompass a broader view of educating students as whole individuals whose experience in community life is not defined by disciplinary distinctions. Further, the institution as a whole must be realigned toward a view of community that includes the campus as part of, not separate from, the local community. This kind of alignment would reorient the resources of the college or university toward community resources, raising questions of community economic development and the investment of capital for community revitalization.

In a framework of civic education, higher education would address the questions: To what extent does our

institution create and sustain long-term partnerships with communities and civic bodies? To what extent can our civic partners point to long-term, positive experiences with our campus? Are these partnerships framed in ways which reflect the college or university's commitments to and self-interests in community building and civic vitality, that integrate community experience into the learning of students and the professional service opportunities for staff, and that fully understand and appreciate the public dimensions of scholarly work? These are the questions now at the heart of service-learning. It is our hope that educators will shape their answers in a way that deepens the practice of service-learning and makes institutions of higher education more responsive to community renewal.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Service-learning has moved beyond the marginalized, co-curricular model of altruism to a sophisticated and integrated pedagogy of promise. The service-learning field currently boasts a diverse group of scholars and community partners committed to addressing a range of social concerns and engaging higher education in questions of civic purpose. Campus Compact is a recognized leader in that movement, engaging campuses across the country in discussions of service and civic engagement. Founded in 1985 by the presidents of Brown, Georgetown, and Stanford universities and the president of the Education Commission of the States, Campus Compact has grown to a national coalition of approximately 700 college and university presidents devoted to the civic purposes of higher education. To support this civic mission, Campus Compact promotes community service that develops students' citizenship skills and values, encourages collaborative partnerships between campuses and communities, and assists faculty who seek to integrate public and community engagement into their teaching and research. In addition to Campus Compact there are a number of other organizations that offer information and resources to colleges and universities:

LINKS TO SERVICE-LEARNING RESOURCES ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB

Campus Compact
<http://www.compact.org>

A comprehensive site that includes resources for service-learning practitioners, including faculty, presidents, and administrators. Includes a calendar of events, extensive links to web resources, job listings,

news, model programs and sample syllabi, a section dedicated to “Building the Service-Learning Pyramid,” and much more.

American Association of Colleges & Universities

www.aacu-edu.org

AAC&U’s site provides detailed descriptions of its projects, including the Diversity Initiative, in which service-learning and campus-community partnerships play an important role. The site also contains general information about membership, meetings, and publications.

American Association of Community Colleges Service-Learning Page

www.aacc.nche.edu/initiatives/SERVICE/SERVICE.HTM

The site for AACC’s service-learning project. Includes links to model programs at various community college campuses, general information about federal initiatives such as America Reads and practical information about applying service-learning in the community college curriculum. Also includes a listing of workshops and events and links to service-learning organizations.

American Association of Higher Education Service-Learning Project

www.aahe.org/service/srv-lrn.htm

A description of AAHE’s Service-Learning Project, including coalition-building conferences and the 18-volume monograph series on service-learning in the disciplines. Also includes links to other service-learning resources and to other AAHE programs and partnerships.

The Big Dummy’s Guide to Service-Learning

www.fiu.edu/~time4chg/Library/bigdummy.html

This site is organized around frequently asked questions and divided into faculty and programmatic issues. Includes “101 Ideas for Combining Service & Learning” in various disciplines.

Campus Compact National Center for Community Colleges

www.mc.maricopa.edu/academic/compact/

Includes listings of events, awards, and publications (with an on-line order form and a number of on-line versions). Also includes detailed descriptions of CCNCCC’s mission and major projects.

The Colorado Service-Learning Home Page

Csf.Colorado.EDU/sl/

A comprehensive site with definitions of service-learning; a thorough listing of undergraduate service-learning programs with online course lists and syllabi; links to college and university homepages; and a list of

links to service-learning organizations, networks, and resources. This site also houses a searchable archive of the Colorado Service-Learning listserv.

The Journal of Public Service & Outreach

www.uga.edu/~jps/

The site for the Journal includes information about the Journal’s mission and information about subscribing to the Journal or submitting articles. You can subscribe electronically from the site.

Learn and Serve America Training and Technical Assistance Exchange

www.lsaexchange.org

The LSA Exchange provides service-learning technical assistance (including peer training) to schools, colleges, and universities. The site includes information about the Exchange and links to its partners and regional centers, and current news articles and conference listings.

Learn, Serve, & Surf

www.edb.utexas.edu/servicelearning/index.html

An “internet resource kit” for service-learning practitioners. A site created as part of a graduate student’s work in Instructional Technology and the University of Texas at Austin. Lists model programs and practices, listservs, discussion sites, links, etc. Also contains a definition and description of service-learning and its various components, with a bibliography.

Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning

www.umich.edu/~ocsl/MJCSL/

The MJCSL is a peer-reviewed academic journal containing papers written by faculty and service-learning educators on research, theory, pedagogy, and issues pertinent to the service-learning community. The site contains abstracts of MJCSL articles and information on subscribing and submitting manuscripts.

The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse

www.nicsl.coled.umn.edu

This site contains a searchable database of K-12 and higher education service-learning literature, information about events, listservs, and Learn & Serve America efforts and links to a variety of service-learning information resources.

National Society for Experiential Education

www.nsee.org

Includes information about various experiential education methods, including service-learning. Also includes membership and conference information, lists of publications and resources, and a description of NSEE’s mission and history.

New England Resource Center for Higher Education
www.nerche.org

The site includes descriptions of NERCHE's funded projects, including Faculty Professional Service. Also included are news updates, descriptions of think tanks, and contact information.

NCTE's Service-Learning in Composition Website
www.ncte.org/service/

This site is a resource for teachers, researchers, and community partners interested in connecting writing instruction to community action.

Service-Learning Internet Community
www.slic.calstate.edu

This site is an online community for California State University service-learning practitioners (but available to those outside the CSU system). It includes sample syllabi, lessons, and projects; information on awards, grants, and scholarships; news; and more.

The author wished to thank and acknowledge John Saltmarsh and Richard Cone for their contributions to this paper.

AUTHOR

Kerrissa Heffernan, Ed.D. is senior associate in Integrating Service with Academic Study at Campus Compact, Brown University. Previously she was the Arnow Weiler professor of liberal arts at Lasell College. Additionally she was the director of the Center for Public Service, director of the Donahue Institute for Values and Public Life and founder and director of Camp Colors: a summer program for pre-school children with HIV/AIDS.

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