

Considerations for Developing a Service-Learning Component

Service-Learning: a type of experiential education that combines and pursues both achieving academic learning and meeting a relevant community defined need while intentionally integrating the use of effective ongoing reflection and assessment.

(Drake Experiential Learning Council, 2011)

Align with Course Learning Objectives

- What is your goal? Is it to expose students to an issue? Practice a skill set? Gain direct contact with a population?
- How does a service experience connect to your course learning objectives? Are there objectives that can be met through a service activity rather than a traditional assignment? For example, a graphic design class partnered with Al Éxito! to design a book for publication rather than creating publications solely for class use.
- What type of service activities will the students perform? For example, will students:
 - Engage in direct service to an organization and its members;
 - Participate in an advocacy campaign;
 - Provide indirect service by conducting research for an organization; or
 - Plan and develop marketing materials or an event for an organization.
- How will the service activity increase students' learning in order to meet the course objectives?

Service Integration

- How will service-learning support and enhance classroom instruction? Articulate this in your syllabus.
- What activities will you utilize to link the service and learning objectives (discussion, journal, assignments, etc)?
- How will the service activities will be implemented during the course? For example, will students:
 - Participate during class time, a service lab, or outside of class time?
 - Make off-campus visits?
 - Work remotely via email or skype?
- Decide if the project will be a mandatory component of the course or optional.
 - If it's mandatory, what will the accountability measures be?
 - Discuss incorporating a service-learning activity into your class with CEL staff.
 - Review the syllabi of faculty who have participated in service-learning.

Community Partners

- Identify a partner agency
 - If you need help with identifying a partner or if you have a potential community partner in mind, CEL staff will serve as a liaison between you and the community partner.
- Will all students in the class will work with the same community partner or will there be multiple projects?
- How will you determine the community partner's specific goals and needs for the project?
 - This process will usually require telephone conversations and/or a meeting with the community partner. CESL staff can help arrange the meetings.
 - Define how the project will meet the partner's goals and needs.
 - Identify the tasks that students will complete. The service should meet needs that are necessary and valuable for the organization.

- How will the students be introduced to the organization, including its mission, goals and objectives, clients served, and services provided?
 - The students' roles and responsibilities to the organization should be clarified (e.g., specific tasks, number of hours required per semester, timelines), as well as the organization's rules, regulations, confidentiality policies, dress code, and timekeeping requirements. A representative from the community partner is usually invited to attend a class session to present these issues.
- How will the students be supervised at the service site? How will they keep track of the time they spend there?
 - CEL staff encourage the focus on project completion rather than hours accumulation.
- How will the service work be presented to the community partner? For example: Will the partner be invited to class to hear final presentations?
- How will you incorporate reading or activities that help students understand the rationale behind service-learning as a pedagogy and high impact learning strategy? CEL staff can provide suggestions.

Reflection

Reflection is a critical component of service-learning. It is the key way for students to synthesize their experience and connections between their service and the course content.

- How will you clarify to students that the reflection component demonstrates their learning, and that the grade they receive on the service-learning activity is based on this documentation rather than the service that is performed? (see Assessment section below).
- Provide students with scaffold activities to help them examine the learning taking place during the service experience. CEL staff can provide resources.
- What type of reflection method best aligns with your service-learning activity? Examples include: journals, short papers, and presentations. CEL staff can provide additional resources.
- How will you integrate regular on-going opportunities for reflection before, during, and after the service-learning project?

Assessment

Student performance is evaluated through their reflections. Students must demonstrate that they have made connections between the classroom theory and the service-learning activity. Grades should not be based on the number of hours that students spend at a site. Grades should be based on students' metacognition of classroom knowledge applied to an authentic community task.

Faculty should develop a rubric to determine how to evaluate the students' performance in connecting the service-learning activity to the learning objectives. CEL staff can provide resources.

Evaluation

CEL staff members conduct annual follow-up with community partners, but faculty should ask students to evaluate their working relationship with the community partner and specific project.

Ready to get started? Contact Renee Sedlacek, Director of Community Engaged Learning, renee.sedlacek@drake.edu