ACT
Appalachian & the Community Together

ASU's
Service-Learning Program

Getting Started: Tips For Developing & Teaching A Successful Service-Learning Course

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What Is Service-Learning?

Service-learning is a progressive way of teaching that has been adopted by university faculty nationwide. As distinguished from traditional community service, service-learning is intentionally linked with an academic course and incorporates specific pedagogical goals for community service -- which includes structured reflection activities within the classroom. With social justice at its philosophical root, service-learning pedagogy naturally combines the "life of the mind with habits of the heart." In recent years, ASU faculty members from a variety of disciplines have adopted service-learning as a teaching tool in their classrooms and have found that service projects complement and enhance other traditional learning vehicles such as reading and writing.

Before Developing/Rewriting Your Course Syllabus...

Call ACT to request a <u>Service-Learning Resource Guide For Faculty</u> and download a "Service-Learning Project Request Form" from the ACT website (www.act.appstate.edu). The Resource Guide will help you understand the distinctions between traditional community service and service-learning, principles of good practice, the benefits of service-learning, expectations of each party involved, etc. In addition, it will provide you with examples of the necessary forms that you need to get your students registered with ACT.

During the semester PRIOR to teaching a service-learning course, set up a meeting with the ACT Service-Learning Coordinator to discuss your ideas for integrating service-learning into your course.

When You Develop/Rewrite Your Course Syllabus, Consider the Following Principles...

Establish the method in which you will integrate service-learning into your course. Would you like to infuse service-learning throughout the entire semester, or do you prefer to offer it as a project option to your students? Also, consider the idea of having your students participate in a community-based research project designed to address the informational needs of an agency while applying classroom theory. *For more information on methods of integrating service-learning, please see page 6 in the <u>Service-Learning Resource Guide For Faculty</u>.*

Include activities and/or assignments that will prepare your students for their service-learning experience. Well prepared students will feel more comfortable with the assignment, will be able to serve the agency/clients more effectively, and will ultimately learn more from their experiences. *Note: See page 13 in the <u>Service-Learning Resource Guide For Faculty</u> for preparation ideas.*

Set learning goals for students or work with them to set their own goals. Learning objectives in a course that has a service-learning component should explicitly state how the community experience will be integrated into the course content, as well as how it will be evaluated. Remember, you are not giving credit for doing service; rather, credit in academic courses is given to students who demonstrate their understanding of the course material.

Establish criteria for the selection of service placements. Service experiences need to 1) be connected to the course content and stimulate deeper learning of course material, 2) be sufficient in terms of time to meet the learning objectives of the course, and 3) meet an existing community need. In most situations, younger students often need more structured criteria than older students — that is, allow younger students to choose from a few options that you have selected, but encourage older students to choose from a wide variety of options that they select themselves. But, remember to be flexible in either situation.

Establish project deadlines that will serve as "check points" throughout the semester. Many students have a tendency to put off finding a community placement until the last possible moment. Procrastination can have a negative impact on student learning, as well as cause unnecessary strain on our community partners. To help avoid this problem, make sure that students have established a community site by a specific date and/or require them to complete an "Agreement Form" and keep a "Time Log" of their hours. *Note: See the Appendix in the <u>Service-Learning Resource Guide For Faculty</u> for samples of these forms.*

Provide academically rigorous mechanisms to draw out learning from the service experience. Coursework needs to provoke analysis of the service experience within the academic context of the course. Research papers, discussions, presentations, journals, etc. can all be used as reflection tools that help students bridge service and learning. *Note: See page 13-15 in the Service-Learning Resource Guide For Faculty for reflection ideas.*

Provide support structures for students to learn how to draw out what they have learned during their experiences in the community. Critical thinking/analysis requires a student to have "higher order" cognitive abilities. Thus, students who have not been exposed to this type of work need to be assisted in acquiring the skills that are necessary for examining the link between their coursework and what they have learned during their service experience. *Sample questions that help move students from simply reporting what they experienced to analyzing their experiences within the context of the course can be found on pages 14-15 in the Service-Learning Resource Guide For Faculty. These questions can also be used for "guided journaling" assignments.*
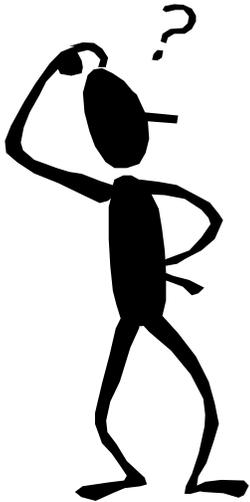
Before the Semester Begins..

Complete a "Service-Learning Project Request Form," attach a copy of your revised syllabus, and return it to the office. Deadlines for each semester are: Fall (July 1st), Spring (Novem- ber 1st). This step sets the "wheels in motion" and helps the Service-Learning Coordinator design appropriate service project options for your students. Note: Without this documentation, ACT has no way of knowing that you have officially revised your syllabus to include a service-learning component and cannot plan accordingly.

Establish whether you will provide "project options" for your students or allow them to choose their own individual projects. Based on your course requirements, learning objectives, the number of students in your class, etc., ACT's Service-Learning Coordinator will design service-learning project options for your students; or, if you prefer your students to select their own community

Review the project options that has sent you (if applicable) and contact the agency representatives to introduce yourself. This simple step will help you create a "partnership" with the community agency(ies), rather than just sending your students to a unknown community site. It is our hope that this partnership will continue to grow each time you teach this course.

Or, if you choose to allow your students to make their own choices from the opportunities listed in ACT's Service Opportunities Directory, stop by the ACT Community Outreach Center to familiarize yourself with ACT's resources. This simple step will help facilitate the selection process because the more you know about ACT's resources and services, the better you can explain them to your students. *Note: If you choose this option, you may find it more feasible to send a "standard letter" (rather than a phone call) to each agency that your students are serving at in order to introduce yourself and explain your course objectives.*

During the First Few Weeks of Class...

While reviewing your syllabus with your students, discuss the guidelines for the service-learning activities included in the course and distribute the project options (if applicable) provided to you by ACT. This important step will serve as a starting point that ACT representatives can build upon during the Service-Learning Orientation that your students will attend.

Announce the ACT Service-Learning Orientation dates/times to your students during the FIRST DAY of class. We highly encourage your students to attend one of these 1-hour presentations during weeks 2 & 3 of the semester. It will help them understand the concept of service-learning, help prepare them for their service experience, provide them with ideas for choosing a community site, and reinforce the fact that there are assignments associated with the service project. In addition, we will provide them with *Tips For Completing A Successful Service-Learning Project.* You will be notified of the dates/times/locations of these presentations prior to the beginning of each semester.
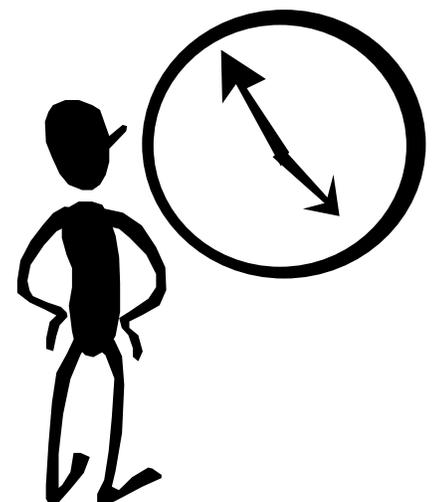
Remind students about established deadlines. Once again, procrastination can have a negative impact on student learning, as well as cause unnecessary strain on our community partners. Encourage your students to start early when deciding on a service-learning site, and ensure that they are doing their required service projects. This can be accomplished by collecting journal assignments, progress reports, or having their community site supervisor verify their hours. If your students are having trouble finding an appropriate service-learning project/site, please let us know and we will do our best to help them.

Personally contact each of the agencies that your students are serving. After your students have chosen their service-learning project/site, write, call, or e-mail the contact person at the agency to introduce yourself and let them know that some of your students will be working at their agency in conjunction with your class. This small step will make a huge difference in developing an on-going relationship with the agency, and will help them to understand more about your course goals/structure.

Throughout the Semester, Be Sure To...

Minimize the distinction between the student's community learning role and the classroom learning role by encouraging your students to do continuous reflection. Learning in the classroom and learning in the community need to be as synergistic as possible. By establishing a rhythm of action and reflection, deeper learning is likely to occur. Continuous reflection will not only help students gain a better understanding of the course material, it will likely promote students' cognitive and psychosocial development. You are welcome to borrow books from the ACT Resource Library to assist you with developing creative reflection activities. Please call ACT's Service-Learning Coordinator for more information. *Note: See page 5 in the Service-Learning Resource Guide For Faculty for further information about how service-learning can affect student learning/ development.*

Be prepared for unexpected situations and variations in student learning outcomes. A wide variety of community placements can lead to different learning outcomes. But, instead of viewing this as a problem, establish a classroom format that encourages collaborative learning — allowing students to learn "vicariously" through their peers' experiences. You will be amazed at the profound impact that this can have on your students!

At the End of the Semester, Please...

Invite ACT's Service-Learning Coordinator and the agencies your students have served to your students' final presentations (if applicable). Listening to your students' experiences and reflections can assist ACT and our Community Partners with developing future service-learning projects.

Encourage your students to continue serving at the agency they selected for their class project. Your students most likely have some outstanding skills and knowledge from which this agency would benefit. Furthermore, they will be able to use this service project as an experience on their resume and they may develop relationships with agency professionals who can serve as employment references in the future.

Complete the on-line Service-Learning Evaluations via the ACT website. You will be notified via email when to complete these on-line forms. This information will help us to improve the services that we provide to students, faculty members, and our community partners. Thank you!

Consider how you might utilize your experience with service-learning pedagogy in your tenure/promotion portfolio. Evaluation decisions not only reflect what faculty do, but also, how well they do it. Service-learning can be used to enhance teaching effectiveness, advance scholarship and academic contributions, and provide service to the university and surrounding community. *Note: See page 11-12 in the Service-Learning Resource Guide For Faculty for further information on this topic.*

Ideas for this "tips sheet" were drawn from Howard, J. (Ed) (1993). Praxis I: A faculty casebook on community service learning. Ann Arbor, MI: OSCL Press.