What is Service-Learning (SL) & Community-Based Research (CBR)?

Service-Learning and Community-Based Research are progressive ways of teaching that have been adopted by university faculty worldwide. Distinguished from traditional community service, service-learning is a “teaching method which combines community service with academic instruction as it focuses on critical, reflective thinking, and civic responsibility” (Introduction to Service-Learning Toolkit, 2003). Community-based research, a more specialized form of service-learning, is a collaborative effort between academic researchers (faculty and students) and community partners that has the goal of the achievement of social justice through research.

Why Use SL & CBR in General Education Courses?

With all the expectations and requirements of the general education curriculum, why include service-learning or community-based research? Simply put, because these pedagogies will allow you to meet many of the course objectives, goals, and expectations of the general education curriculum.

Goal 1: Thinking Critically and Creatively- SL/CBR students are given the opportunity to think critically about the problems in our communities and environments, as well as come up with creative solutions for improving the quality of life for those in need and our environment.

Goal 2: Communicating Effectively- SL/CBR students are expected to be able to make meaning of issues facing our community and environment, as well as be able to advocate for the solutions to those problems. By being an advocate, students must speak clearly, present the issues, and serve as a representative for change.

Goal 3: Making Local to Global Connections- SL/CBR students are able to relate the needs of their local community and environment to the global community and environment. Additionally, SL/CBR students are more likely to become involved in international social justice work.

Goal 4: Understanding Responsibilities of Community Membership- SL/CBR students are able to become socially and environmentally responsible local and global citizens because they come to understand their own personal responsibilities to their community and environment.

Additionally, ACT’s assessment services can help you confirm and demonstrate that your course is doing what you want it to do. The ACT program has assessed all of its courses for the past decade, using an online survey to track student learning outcomes -- many of which are closely related to the general education learning outcomes. For example, students have reported an increase in their ability to:

➢ Identify problems in the community (87%), understand their causes (82%), and come up with possible solutions (84%).
➢ Understand how their personal (historical, cultural, etc.) viewpoints affect the way they perceive new knowledge (84%).
➢ Effectively communicate verbally (90%), in writing (69%), work in groups with others (87%), and be more comfortable working with people different than themselves (89%).
➢ Have a better understanding of their role as a community member (90%) and are more concerned about community issues (86%).

SL & CBR Project Ideas for Historical & Social Themes

Appalachia

In this theme, students examine the natural environment, culture, society, and human identity in the Appalachian region with an eye toward understanding its unique qualities as well as its place within the nation and larger world.

Here at Appalachian State University, students in Learner Diversity courses work with the Appalachian Family Storytelling Project, which helps develop the literacy skills of underprivileged children and families by letting the family’s story be told. Students work with families to document the history of a family tradition or object and then create a published story for the family. The result is a living, literary work that develops from the relationships formed between student and teacher, teacher and family, and people and community.
Cultural Diversity

In this theme, students examine the nature of cultural and religious values and beliefs, modern historical influences on cultural variation, and the impact of gender, ethnicity, and inequality on the cultural experience.

At Xavier University, professors Carol Winkelmann and Dr. Kandi Stinson examine the ways in which women’s bodies are both constructed and deconstructed in postmodern culture and the ethical, social, and political implications of these processes for the well-being of women in their Technologies of Gender course. This interdisciplinary course combines research, service, and linguistics to provide students with experience in “action research” or community-based research. Students work in groups with community agencies to research a specific topic and then create a usable product for the agency.

Individual & Society

In this theme, students will focus on relationships between the individual and society, as well as examine both the biological and cognitive foundations of individual behavior and the cultural forces that influence personal experiences.

At the University of South Florida, students in Lisa Brown and Kathryn Frahm’s Mental Health Assessment of Older Adults class learn about the challenges facing the elderly. Students then apply their knowledge by working with the non-profit ElderNet to gain first hand experience working with the elderly and researching their needs.

Mind

In this theme, students examine the nature of knowledge, creativity, and the concept of “truth.” Students will consider the social, cultural, theoretical, and political pressures that contribute to our understanding of the mind.

At Kapiolani Community College, professors Tanya Renner, Robin Fujikawa, and Leigh Dooley create a learning community for students in their Creativity, Wisdom, and Me class. This community allows students to cultivate their own creativity and wisdom through the study of psychology, philosophy, and composition by exploring the connections between these three disciplines. Students then spend 25 hours during the semester working with a local non-profit and reflecting on their experiences from those three different points of view to enhance learning.

Revolutions & Social Change

Courses in this theme allow students to examine the critical role of political, social, and cultural revolutions in bringing change to human society. Focus is on the origins and effects of revolutions over time.

At DePaul University, professor Charles Strain’s Liberation Theology class focuses on a radical movement for the transformation of Christianity that originated in the “Christian Base Communities” of Latin America and spread from there to North America and the Third World. This class requires students to take a detailed look into oppression and poverty while working with disadvantaged populations in their local area.

Religion, Myth & Society

Courses in this theme explore relationships between people and their belief systems, including the ways in which humans have employed such beliefs to give meaning to their world.

At Buena Vista University, professor Chris Johnson explores the big theological questions in life with his students, with a focus on the connection between God and human suffering through “extensive, informed, and energetic discussion,” as well as readings and papers. Students use their required service-learning hours as experiences they can draw from to relate to class discussions and materials in this experimental and student-directed course.

This American Life

Courses in this theme provide students with a deeper understanding of how the American people created and developed their democratic institutions and social processes, how marginalized groups have sought and won access to civic life, and how Americans have expressed their social and individual conscience to shape their identity.

At Franklin and Marshall College, professor Susan Dicklitch gives students the opportunity to make a difference in the life of a new American immigrant. Students in her class are required to work on a real asylum, Withholding of Removal, or Convention Against Torture (CAT) case with local attorneys. The students are responsible for putting together an immigration court-ready document for their detainee, gathering case evidence on behalf of their detainee, and being there for their detainee during the court proceedings. This experience gives students an in-depth look at the American legal system and an appreciation of the civic freedoms they possess as an American citizen.

**Due to limited space, not all Historical & Social themes are represented in this brochure. For more ideas and full course descriptions, please visit: www.compact.org/category/syllabi**
Getting Started in Service-Learning

ACT has many resources and services available to make starting your service-learning journey easy. Not only is having your class recognized as an ACT sponsored service-learning course going to provide you with resources, assessment tools, research, and support, it will also allow your students with the opportunity to attend an ACT Service-Learning Orientation Session.

Additionally, students registered for ACT sponsored service-learning courses are now able to count those classes towards the Civic Engagement Certificate (formally Citizen Scholar Certificate) Program which honors students who have participated in a significant number of service-learning courses throughout their collegiate career and have distinguished themselves by demonstrating an outstanding level of commitment to civic leadership and social responsibility.

For more information on registering your course as an ACT sponsored service-learning course, please visit the Engagement website and click on “Course Forms”. This link will provide you with more information about teaching a service-learning class and will provide you with instructions on how to submit your syllabus for review. This process will help you to enhance your course(s) by getting feedback from ASU faculty from various disciplines who have had years of experience with service-learning pedagogy.

Resources and Further Readings on this Topic


