

Ten Steps to Develop and Execute a Service Learning Strategy

Here are ten simple steps to execute the strategy in your own class. Obviously *this represents only an outline*. For assistance at any point, call the Service Hub (x1281).

1. **Consider the courses you teach and determine how community service may be helpful in enriching learning in your discipline.** Service-Learning can be effectively used in every academic discipline. Some applications require more imagination than others; often the best are not immediately obvious.
2. **Consider your goals and motives in using the application.** What are you trying to accomplish for your students, yourself and the community. List two or three specific and measurable goals and objectives for your initiative.
3. **Call or visit the Service Hub Director, who can assist you in reviewing your course objectives** to determine those that can be linked to service.
4. **Choose course service options.** Decide how you will incorporate Service-Learning into your course. Options can range from a one-time special project (i.e. Habitat for Humanity, Special Olympics, Environmental Clean-up) to a multi-hour commitment to an agency. The Director can assist you in working with agencies and will serve as a liaison in this area. You can offer the experience as an option for extra credit, an alternative to another assignment, or you can choose to make the Service Learning project a course requirement.
5. **Review and alter your syllabus to reflect the change.** To be successfully integrated, the Service-Learning experience must be more than just an add-on to an already-full syllabus. Allocate some class time for discussion of the experience even if all students do not participate.
6. **Explain and promote to your students your reasons for including Service-Learning in your class.** Explain the twofold benefits to the student and community. Provide specifics on the locations, hours, and length of commitment of each service option. For those offering more extensive long term commitments, be sure students are placed in the service early.
7. **Work closely with students to develop specific service and learning objectives for their Service-Learning experiences.** Students must be guided in their development of these objectives so that they are clearly linked with the academics of your course. In some cases you may wish to delay this step until after students have been oriented to their placements so that can have some idea of what kinds of service they will be doing. Establishing these Service-Learning objectives up-front is a critical step in assuring the effectiveness of the Service-Learning experience in enhancing students' understanding of course material.

8. **Teach students how to harvest the service experience for knowledge.** Experiential learning requires that we learn where we are. We can learn a variety of things in many different situations depending on the questions we ask. Because many students lack confidence and experience in learning in non-traditional, non-classroom settings, we must teach them these skills. While we want our students prepared and oriented to service, we must be careful not to over-prepare them for their Service Learning experience. We all enjoy the adventure of discovery and you will destroy that for your students by telling them exactly what to expect. Their experience then becomes a comparison instead of an adventure. Give them a good overview and set them free.
9. **Link the service experience to your academic course through deliberate and guided reflection.** The practice of reflection connects learning to service. We cannot assume learning will automatically result from experience. Reflection can be in the form of journals, essays, class presentations, analytic papers, artwork, drama, dialogue, or other expressive acts. Course objectives and service projects will determine the most appropriate type of reflection. The key is structure and direction. A personal journal or group discussion is a great way to elicit effective disclosure. Written reflection helps improve basic communication skills and leads to critical thinking about the academic focus (through questions you have prescribed). It is the most common and least intrusive in terms of taking up class time. Other techniques are purposeful dialogue and reflective class sessions, which provide opportunities for students to share experiences while exchanging ideas and critical insights. An advantage of the reflective session is its power to develop a sense of community. The faculty member serves as the facilitator to maintain the flow of ideas and commentator to jump on relevant ideas and develop them into teachable moments. Whatever form is chosen, it is important to incorporate reflection early and continuously in the Service Learning experience.
10. **Evaluate your Service Learning outcomes as you would any other academic product.** Remember, students are being graded on academic product, not on hours of service. Many of us feel uncertain when it comes to evaluating or assessing the outcomes of experiences we did not completely structure or present. By designing flexible measures, you can use the same standard used in evaluating any other written or oral presentation, such as: Did the student master the course objective?