

Six Models For Integrating Service-Learning Into The Curriculum

The following is adapted from: Heffernan, Kerrissa. *Fundamentals of Service-Learning Course Construction*. RI: Campus Compact, 2001, pp 2–7, 9.

Author and educator Kerrissa Heffernan has outlined six different models for faculty to consider when developing service-learning into their discipline:

1. Discipline-Based Service-Learning Model

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 using course content as a basis for their analysis and understanding. The link between course content and community experience must be made very clear to students.

Benefit: The students' education becomes multifaceted and their overall understanding of theoretical concepts improves.

2. Problem-Based Service-Learning Model

Students relate to the community much as “consultants” working for a “client.” Students work with community members to understand a particular community problem or need. This model presumes that the students will have some knowledge they can draw upon to make recommendations to the community or develop a solution to the problem, for example: architecture students might design a park; business students might develop a web site; botany students might identify non-native plants and suggest eradication methods. Caution is needed when using this model of service-learning, although it can be highly effective for some disciplines, promoting the idea of students as “experts” and communities as “clients” can re-emphasize the disparities between universities and communities and re-install the “ivory tower” phenomenon.

Benefit: Problem-based service-learning often alleviates some of the logistical difficulties common in a weekly commitment.

3. Capstone Course Model

These courses are generally designed for majors and minors in a given discipline and are offered almost exclusively to students in their final year. Capstone courses ask students to draw upon the knowledge they have obtained throughout their course work and combine it with relevant service work in the community. The goal of capstone courses is usually either exploring a new topic or synthesizing students understanding of their discipline.

Benefit: Capstone courses offer an excellent way to help students transition from the world of theory to the world of practice.

4. Service Internship Model

This approach is more intense than typical service-learning courses, with students working as many 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. However, unlike traditional internships, service internships have on-going faculty-guided reflection to challenge the students to analyze their new experiences using discipline-based theories. Service internships focus on reciprocity: the idea that the community and the student benefit equally from the experience, but the level of oversight required by a community partner supervisor can be highly demanding.

Benefit: Service internships offer students the opportunity to develop valuable skills while simultaneously seeing how their skills can contribute to community.

5. Undergraduate Community-Based Action Research Model

Community-based action research is similar to an independent study option for the student who is highly experienced in community work. This approach can be effective with small classes or groups of students. In this model, students work closely with faculty members to learn research methodology while serving as advocates for communities. This model assumes that students are competent in time management, are self-directed learners, and can negotiate diverse communities. These assumptions can become problematic and the ramifications of students' failures can impact the community.

Benefit: This method of service-learning is effective with small classes and groups of students.

6. Directed Study Additional/Extra Credit Model

Students can register for up to three additional credits in a course by making special arrangements with the instructor to complete additional work or explore a subject in more depth. The course instructor serves as the advisor for the directed study option. The department must approve the extra credit and the student must formally register for those additional credits during the drop-add period at the beginning of the semester.

Benefit: Students choosing this option are typically self-directed and motivated.

Which model is most appropriate for you?

1. Consider connections between your course objectives and your departmental objectives
2. Consider connections between the institutional mission and the community's expectations
3. Consider your teaching and learning goals and the potential expectations of your students

Remember! Service-learning is different from:

By Andrew Furco. 1996. *Service-Learning: A Balanced Approach to Experiential Education*. Expanding Boundaries: Service & Learning. Corporation for National Service.

Volunteerism

...where the primary emphasis is on the service being provided and the primary intended beneficiary is clearly the service recipient.

Community Service

...where the primary focus [is] on the service being provided as well as the benefits the service activities have on the recipients. The students receive some benefits by learning more about how their service makes a difference.

Internships

...[that] engage students in service activities primarily for the purpose of providing students with hands-on experiences that enhance their learning or understanding of issues relevant to a particular area of study.

Field Education

...[that] provide students with co-curricular service opportunities that are related, but not fully integrated, with their formal academic studies. Students perform the service as a part of a program that is designed primarily to enhance students' understanding of a field of study, while also providing substantial emphasis on the service being provided.

Remember! Service-learning must include these elements:

- Students must provide a meaningful and needed service to the community, identified and asked for by the community.
- Relationships between the University and the community site must strive to be a reciprocal partnership.
- Connections between the course objectives and service activities must be clearly conceptualized & articulated.
- Faculty must guide students in understanding the relevancy of their work in the community to the course objectives.
- Faculty must provide opportunities for students to reflect upon their experiences in a variety of mediums.
- Disciplinary knowledge informs the work done by students in the community.
- Classroom activities allow students to learn from other class members, in addition to the instructor.

Remember! Service-learning syllabi must:

1. Clearly explain the role of service in the course
2. Demonstrate how service connects to course content
3. Clarify why service is the pedagogy of choice
4. Describe what the service component will entail