# WSU Center for Civic Engagement Beyond Traditions

Taking Service Learning to the Next Level

## Let's take this Relationship to the Next Level

Building the Partnership between Community, Faculty & the CCE

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Adapted from guides created by:

Center for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning Website: www.uc.edu/cetl/pedagogy/service-learning/default.html

&

California State University Service Learning Website: http://www.calstate.edu/csl/

On behalf of the Center for Civic Engagement, we would like to thank you for entering into a partnership with us to provide richer civic engagement opportunities for Washington State University students. By accepting and supervising WSU students, you are helping them to join classroom theory with real-life experience. Ultimately you are also contributing to the university's mission of promoting civic responsibility.

This packet of resources is designed to enable you to construct a safe and effective learning environment for the student(s) assigned to your site. Please carefully consider the commitment that you will be making in creating this partnership. The service and learning must be worthwhile and valuable for both the student and your agency; there must be reciprocity between the server and those served.

In this packet you will find some general information that will help you to understand service learning better and how it differs from other types of experiential learning (learning through experience). You will also find some helpful hints and guidelines for developing the service experience.

Thank you!

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## WHAT IS SERVICE LEARNING?

Service learning is a reflective educational experience in which students earn academic credit by participating in meaningful service activities. Service learning experiences are designed to foster deeper understanding of course content and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.

#### Service learning is-

- Different from volunteer efforts or community service. When students do community service they help to meet community needs through volunteering. In service learning, students go beyond this by using the service experience as a foundation to examine themselves, their society, and their futures.
- Based on a reciprocal relationship in which the service reinforces and strengthens the learning and the learning reinforces and strengthens the service.
- Integrated into the academic curriculum such that students have structured opportunities to reflect critically on their experiences. This reflection takes place through a combination of writing, reading, speaking, listening, and group discussions.
- An opportunity for students to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their own communities.
- When students earn academic credit for demonstrating that they have learned through service rather than simply putting in the hours.

Service learning fosters a sense of caring for others and a commitment to civic responsibility.

## TERMS OF EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

**Volunteerism:** Volunteerism is the engagement of the students in activities where the primary emphasis is on the service being provided and the primary intended beneficiary is clearly the service recipient.

**Community service:** Community service is the engagement of students in activities that primarily focus on the service being provided as well as the benefits their service activities have on the recipients. The students receive some benefit by learning more about how their service makes a difference in the lives of the service recipients.

**Service learning:** Service learning programs are distinguished from other approaches to experiential education by their intention to equally benefit the provider and the recipient of the

service as well as to ensure equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring.

**Field education:** In field education, 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.

**Internships and Practicums:** Internships and practicums engage students in service activities primarily for the purpose of providing students with hands-on experiences that enhance their learning or understanding of issues related to a particular area of study.

## SERVICE LEARNING: ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

**Reciprocity:** The service and learning must be worthwhile and valuable for both the student and the community. There must be reciprocity between the server and those served.

**Reflection:** Intentional, systematic reflection about the experience must take place in order to accomplish critical thinking in community service experiences. Reflection of the volunteer experience encourages introspection of other aspects of the student's life.

**Development:** Service learning occurs in different stages: beginning with serving, to enabling, to empowering; from observation, to experience, to leadership.

**Meaningful service:** Service tasks need to be worthwhile and challenging in order to strengthen students' critical thinking.

**Diversity:** A priority is placed on involving a broad cross-section of students working in diverse settings and with a diverse population within the community.

# PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN COMBINING SERVICE AND LEARNING

- An effective program engages people in responsible and challenging actions for the common good.
- An effective program provides structured opportunities for people to reflect critically on their service experiences.
- An effective program articulates clear service and learning goals for everyone involved.
   From the outset of the project, participants and service recipients alike must have a clear sense of what is to be accomplished and what is to be learned.

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- An effective program allows for those with needs to define those needs.
- An effective program clarifies the responsibilities of each person and organization involved.
- An effective program matches service providers and service needs through a process that recognizes changing circumstances.
- An effective program expects genuine, active, and sustained organizational commitment.
- An effective program includes training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition, and evaluation to meet service and learning goals.
- An effective program insures that the time commitment for service and learning is flexible, appropriate, and in the best interests of all involved.
- An effective program is committed to program participation by and with diverse populations.

## BENEFITS OF SERVICE LEARNING

#### **Benefits to Students**

- Learn from the agency personnel, clientele, experience, and the instructor
- Explore majors and careers; gain valuable job experience and strengthen the resume
- · Enhance critical thinking skills and moral/ethical development
- Provide practical application of academic pursuits
- Increase understanding of multicultural values and traditions

#### Benefits to Faculty

- Form new ways of encouraging students' academic progress and comprehension
- Build avenues for greater understanding through intentional critical reflection
- Improve the motivational base for instruction and learning
- · Generate support and positive publicity in the community
- · Establishes relationships with people in the community

#### Benefits to the Community

- Increases opportunities for collaboration and the creation of possible solutions
- Enhances meaningful services to the community
- Increases awareness of community needs
- Creates opportunities for community partners to participate in student learning
- Builds community awareness of college programs and services

## THE MECHANICS OF SERVICE LEARNING

Typically, faculty members incorporate a service learning component within their class curriculum, either as an option or as a requirement. Service learning offers a continuum of possibilities ranging from a one-time service experience to working with the same agency for a few hours per week over the course of a semester. The range of appropriate placements is circumscribed by the specific content of the particular course.

The faculty member works with the CCE to carefully choose a limited number of agencies whose needs are related to his or her teaching objectives. The faculty member also sets a minimum number of hours to be completed by the students and develops a reflective component that may include assignments such as journals, readings, class discussions, writing assignments, and class presentations about the service learning experience.

At the beginning of each semester, the faculty member introduces the service learning component to his or her class. Students are given information about placement options and choose one of these "approved" placements based on their interests, schedules, and locations. The student then contacts the agency to set up an interview and/or attend an orientation.

Because service is integrated into the class structure, students must be able to complete their placements within the semester time frame (14 weeks maximum). It takes a couple of weeks to get students assigned, oriented, and started. Agencies are asked to adjust by scheduling orientations and trainings at the beginning of the semester and by developing placements that can be completed in that time frame.

## GUIDELINES FOR AN EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP

Partnerships between faculty, the CCE and community organizations are formal, long-term relationships founded on the clear articulation of needs, capacities, responsibilities, and expectations. Regular communication, evaluation, and equal say in the design and implementation of projects are its defining features.

Partnerships entail making a commitment to the agency, relinquishing control over aspects of the program, and accepting new responsibilities. The following is a list of guiding principles for creating and sustain a mutually beneficial partnership:

- Partners agree on the mission, values, goals, and measurable outcomes for the partnership.
- The relationship between partners is characterized by mutual trust, respect, genuineness, and commitment.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Kopek, Tamar. Rethinking Tradition: Integrating Service with Academic Study on College Campuses. Campus Compact. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 1993. P. 113.

- The partnership builds on identified strengths and assets, but also addresses areas that need improvement.
- The partnership balances power among partners and assures that resources among partners be shared.
- There is clear, open, regular, and accessible communication between partners. Listening to each need, developing a common language, and validating/clarifying the meaning of terms are ongoing priorities.
- Roles, responsibilities, and procedures for the partnership are established with the input and agreement of all partners.
- All stakeholders in the partnership provide regular feedback, with the goal of continuously improving the partnership and its outcomes.
- Partners share the credit for the partnership's accomplishments.
- Partnerships take time to develop and evolve.

A sustainable partnership requires working on common interests while maintaining a quality service-learning experience for everyone.

## Benefits and Risks in Partnership Building

Creating a partnership is not an easy task. Both the community organization and the faculty member experience remarkable benefits from the relationship, but also may face risks in doing so due to lack of planning. *Appendix B* is a listing of both parties and how partnership building can be of benefit or of cost.

## HELPFUL HINTS FOR MAKING THE EXPERIENCE A SUCCESS

#### Students as well as volunteers.

Keep in mind that service learning students not only want to help meet important community needs, but they are using the experience as the basis for understanding their college courses. Students are receiving academic credit for learning through their service efforts. Please help students think about what the experiences mean to them.

#### Plan ahead.

Think about how you can use the services of our students to effectively and creatively meet the needs of your agency. Are there tasks that you and your staff are now doing that could be divided up and given to a student, thereby freeing up some of your time for other duties? Is there a project you've always wanted to do but never had any time to organize? Don't be afraid to give the student a chance to show that he or she can handle the responsibility.

### Be selective in choosing service learning students for your agency.

We have provided students with a listing of possible service opportunities, but it is generally their responsibility to make the initial contact. There may be a number of reasons why a student has called your agency- the work you do, the location, and the hours. If the student's qualifications and/or motivations are not in harmony with your needs, do not hesitate to reject that student's request. The final selection is made by you.

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## Provide orientation and training.

Students generally need some orientation to your agency, staff, and clients.

Familiarize them with the mission and the philosophy of your agency as well as the community issues your agency is trying to address. They should know to whom they report and where to go to get support and information when that person is unavailable.

#### Be realistic with your expectations for our students.

Our students have to complete the service project within the semester. If you do agree to take on a student, make every effort to provide orientation and training early in the semester. And remember, the student will only be with you for the duration of the semester (approximately 14-15 weeks).

## Be an involved teacher and mentor for our students.

The student-supervisor relationship is one of the most significant parts of the student's experiences and often determines the success of the placement. In service learning, the supervisor becomes a partner in the student's education.

#### Say thanks!

Like everyone, students want to be welcomed and appreciated. This may take many forms from letters of recognition, to a thank you note, to a simple acknowledgement of a job well done. They also need to see how their work is important to your agency's mission. Ask the students how they are doing and what areas can be improved upon.

#### Talk to us.

Keep our office informed of any concerns, problems, successes, or other pertinent issues related to the placement and/or the student. We are here to facilitate the entire process and ensure that all stakeholders are satisfied.

## Some Recommended Guidelines for Orientation

Once the placement is agreed upon, a specific assignment is determined, and the **Service Learning Plan and Agreement** is signed, the service learning student should be provided with a thorough orientation. The orientation should make the student feel accepted and clarify his/her role, responsibilities, and expectations- as well as how this all fits in with your agency's mission.

Here are some suggestions for providing a general orientation:

- A tour of the facility.
- An introduction to the staff.
- A review of the rules, regulations, policy, dress codes, and timekeeping requirements. (Note: in addition to any timekeeping records your agency may have, students will

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- generally have their own logs which will need to be signed by their supervisors each time they are at the agency.)
- Parking and safety should be discussed for some agencies.
- A discussion of the student's role, including specific tasks and specific benefits to the agency. Please acquaint the student with any agency procedures for notifying the agency if the student has to miss one of his/her scheduled workdays.
- An explanation of any jargon or language used by the staff.