

Guidance for Incorporating Service-Learning into an Online Course

This guidance document provides step by step instructions on how to prepare and implement an online service-learning course.

PLANNING (3 months prior to course):

1. Determine learning outcomes for course and develop course outline. Consider the following:
 - a. **Curriculum and Assessment:** Service-learning provides alternative context for existing curriculum. Consider including the following in development:
 - Activities that stimulate the acquisition of course concepts/skills;
 - Promotion of high levels of thinking and construction of knowledge;
 - Communication of information and ideas;
 - Assessments that are integrated with instruction (journals, presentations, essays, products, research papers, and self-evaluations).
 - b. **Goals and Objectives:** Whether you are starting with a particular service idea and finding learning objectives to match or vice-versa, you should develop goals for both the service and learning components of the course. Consider students' existing knowledge base and what they might need to learn in order to accomplish their project.
 - c. **Scheduling:** Evaluate the time element necessary for each part of the project. Make sure the students' time and that of the community partner is well spent.
 - d. **Develop Meaningful Reflections:** Reflections provide the bridge between the service experience and the course material. Through well-developed reflections students are challenged to think critically about their experience and to make meaning of these experiences.

DEVELOPMENT OF SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECTS (during first one-fourth of the course)

1. Student Preparation

- a. Provide students with an introduction to the goals and purposes of service-learning. Frame the project as a method of enhancing and achieving course objectives.
- b. Review student expectations for the project including necessary paperwork, required number of hours, and principles of best practice in community partnership.
- c. Connect students to resources and support that will assist them in identifying successful partnerships.

2. Community Agency Preparation

- a. Students identify and make contact with a few organizations in order to determine a site appropriately aligned to the project goals. Students will establish a community partner and will communicate mutual expectations.
- b. Have students and agencies review the course syllabus, course objectives and complete the Service-Learning Contract.
- c. Have agencies complete a Community Partner Orientation that introduces agencies to service-learning, discusses roles, risk, and expectations.
- d. Provide agencies with contact information for university

REFLECTION AND ASSESSMENT (throughout and at end of course)

1. Reflection

- a. Provide students opportunities to reflect throughout the course – before, during, and after the experience. Through guided and purposeful reflections, the students' service experience and course learning are fully integrated. Develop opportunities for both public and private reflection opportunities that allow students to process and contextualize their experience.

b. Reflection Methods/Ideas:

- Group discussions
- Journals
- Video or multimedia presentations
- Blogs or discussion groups
- Directed readings and responses
- Websites
- Portfolios

- Projects created for agency
- Case study/history/ethnography
- Analytic paper
- Individual or group presentations

2. Assessment and Tracking

a. Community Partner: The Service-Learning Office will check in with the organization at midterm and at the end of the semester to evaluate the service-learning project.

- Mid-semester checks will be conducted to solicit feedback from students and agencies on project progress.
- End of semester evaluations will be sent out to agencies and students

b. Student: Determine students' progress and impact.

- Directly linking the service and learning components of course goals and objectives creates the best outcome in evaluations. Using rubrics allows for linking outcomes and objectives. If rubrics are used, be sure to include a section for written comments so that students and community partners have a chance to express additional thoughts or refer to a tangible outcome. Assignments or portfolios that are submitted for course credit can be evaluated in accordance with normal procedures.
- Students should complete the end of semester evaluations to report project successes, challenges and impact

Adapted From:

University of South Dakota Center for Academic Engagement: *Service-Learning Handbook for Distance Learning*, 2009

Geiger, Elke. (2009) Service Learning Toolbox: Work Pages and Checklist to Help You Get Started and Keep You Going. *Northwest regional Education Laboratory*. Website:

http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/filemanager/download/NWREL/SL_Toolbox.pdf