

Ways to Integrate a Service-Learning Component

Curricular design depends on a number of factors including the learning objectives of the course, the experience of the instructor with the pedagogy of service learning and with community partnerships, the academic preparation and number of students expected to enroll in the class, and the type of service contribution identified by the student, instructor and community. Often, faculty experiment with curricular design and, like their service-learning student, “learn by doing”, making modifications and adjustments to the design of the course from one semester to the next.

Option within a Course:

In this design, students have the option to become involved in a service learning project. A portion of the normal coursework is substituted by the service learning component. For example, a traditional research paper or group project can be replaced with a “reflection paper” that documents learning from the service learning. Points given to a service learning project in a course is designated by the instructor.

Disciplinary Service Learning Projects:

Service learning is an excellent way to build upon students’ cumulative knowledge in a specific discipline and to demonstrate the integration of that knowledge with real life issues. Students can explore ways their disciplinary expertise and competencies translate into addressing community needs.

Required within a Course:

In this case, all students are involved in service learning as an integrated aspect of the course. This expectation must be clearly stated at the first class meeting, with a clear rationale provided to students as to why the service learning component is required. Expectation can be arranged on an individual basis or the students can transfer to another class. If all students are involved in service learning, it is easier to design coursework (i.e. class discussions, writing assignments, exam questions) that integrates the service experience with course objectives. Class sessions can involve agency personnel and site visits. Faculty report that it is easier to build community partnerships if a consistent number of students are involved each semester.

Faculty Resource:

We encourage you to incorporate service learning into your course work and are here to assist you and your students.

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