

1.3 Service Learning

This small book provides an introduction to the Service Learning concept.

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Definitions and Background of Service Learning

The term of Service Learning was first invented in 1967, in reference to an internship program that was sponsored by the Southern Regional Education Board and through which college students gained academic credit and/or federally funded finance as remuneration for work on community projects. As a pedagogical practice in higher education, Service learning was limited to a small group of participants until the mid-1980s. By the late 1980s, service-learning was growing in prominence and was finally distinguished from community service by its attention to the integration of service with academic study (Liu, 1995). The 1990s have witnessed tremendous growth in service-learning, such that it is now regarded as a "vital force in educational change". Colleges and universities have espoused a renewed commitment to civic responsibility, with service-learning as a central vehicle for fulfilling this commitment (Crabtree, 2008).

Service learning (SL) is a method that provides young people with opportunities to use newly acquired academic skills and knowledge in real life situations in their own communities. It is also defined as a strategy by which young people learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet the actual community needs and that are coordinated in collaboration with the school and community. SL contains two main elements: engagement within the community (service) and reflection on that engagement (learning). These elements should be balanced by expecting students to "participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs" and "reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility".

According to Jacoby (2014), definitions of service-learning can be divided in two main parts. The first part describes SL as a form of education, and the second part of definitions defines SL as an educational philosophy. **Definitions of SL as a form of education** share three key elements that differentiate SL from other forms of experiential education. These elements are *structured extensive reflection*, *application of learning in real-life settings*, and *relevant service*. *Student reflection* encourages integration of theory and practice. *Application of learning* in real-life contexts should complement objectives of students' future careers. Therefore, *service needs to be relevant*, meaningful, and tightly integrated into the curriculum. **Service-learning as a philosophy** is characterized by "human growth and purpose, a social vision, an approach to community, and a way of knowing".

Based on the assumption that engagement in community service may cause changes in social reality, SL belongs to the tradition of radical/critical pedagogy (Jacoby, 2014). The students can benefit from service learning as: It facilitates effective content teaching, encourages students to reflect on their experience, provides a deeper understanding and a concrete application of the content learned in class, increases the level of students' motivation and critical thinking, teaches independence in the real world, and offers students a valuable experience (Goldberg *et al.*, 2006). In addition to this, service-learning helps to enhance understanding of academic curriculum, provide diverse and practical "real-world" experiences, encourage community involvement, foster civic responsibility, raising awareness of social justice issues and provide career-exploration opportunities.

Further definitions in the literature show, that service learning can be seen as "**a philosophy, pedagogy, and model for community development**" that is used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards. For example, Grim (2005) defines service learning as a new pedagogical approach which can incorporate any subject matter (e.g., sciences, political sciences, English, foreign languages). The philosophy is to provide students with an increased knowledge of the course material through hands on situations and concrete applications. Such application refers to the community that Mitchell (2008) considers as important in academia industry relationships. Mitchell (2008) states that Community service learning serves as a vehicle for connecting students and institutions to their communities and the larger social good, while at the same time instilling in students the values of community and social responsibility.

According to Heffernan (2002), service-learning is a reflective, relational, pedagogy that combines community or public service with structured opportunities for learning. It is premised on experiential education as the foundation for intellectual, moral, and civic growth. This focus on the synergy of the intellectual, moral, and civic dimensions of learning distinguishes service-learning from other forms of experiential education. Rather than focusing on preparing students for a particular job, SL prepares students for practical community-based problem solving.

That said, Barbara Jacoby (2014) confirms that SL is a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities for reflection designed to achieve desired learning outcomes. In other words, SL is a combination of what we know as formal education and applying that learning in a service-oriented way. It is a type of educational philosophy that requires the student to demonstrate their knowledge, thus connecting the cognitive to the emotive and resulting in better learning outcomes. It incorporates personal passions with intellect, empowering students to find their passion and exercise useful ways to engage in real world problems.



Service Learning Models

While there are a number of models of service-learning, most service-learning experiences can be described in the following five categories:

- **Kerrissa Heffernan (2002) models of service learning.**

This SL model developed by Kerrissa Heffernan (2002) is divided into five categories:

- Pure Service-Learning,
- Problem-Based Service-Learning Courses,
- Capstone Courses, Service Internships,
- Undergraduate community-based action research, and
- Community based action research.

- **Pure Service-Learning**

These are courses that not only send students out into the community to serve but have, as their intellectual core, the idea of service to communities by students, volunteers, or engaged citizens. They are not typically lodged in any one discipline. On the other side, there is the *Discipline-Based Service-Learning Courses*. 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 throughout the semester using course content as a basis for their analysis and understanding.

- **Problem-Based Service-Learning Courses**

According to this model, students or teams of students respond to the community much as “consultants” working for a “client.” Students work with community members to understand a particular community problem or need. It is presumed that the students will have some knowledge they can draw upon to make some recommendations to the community or to develop a solution. Architecture students might design a park, business students might develop a web site, botanists might identify non-native plants and suggest eradication methods, etc.

- **Capstone Courses**

These courses are generally designed for majors and minors in a given discipline. As capstone courses they are offered exclusively to seniors or exceptional juniors. They ask students to draw upon the knowledge they have obtained throughout their course work and combine it with relevant service work in the community with the goal of exploring some new topic or to synthesize their understanding of the discipline. These courses offer an excellent way to help students transition between the world of theory and the world of practice while helping student make professional contacts and gather personal experience.

- **Service Internships**

Like traditional internships, these experiences are more intense than typical service-learning experiences with students working as much 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. Unlike traditional internships, these internship programs have regular and on-going reflective opportunities that help involved students analyze their new experiences using discipline-based theories. These reflective opportunities can be done with small groups of peers, with one-on-one meetings with faculty advisors, or even electronically with a faculty member providing feedback. And unlike traditional internships these internships focus on reciprocity – the community and the student benefit equally from the experience.

- **Undergraduate community-based action research**

As a relatively new approach gaining popularity, the community-based action research is similar to an independent study option for the rare student who is highly experienced in community work. In this model students can work closely with faculty members and learn research methodology while continuing to serve as advocates for communities and the issues of importance to communities.

- **Community based action research**

Especially well-suited for methodology courses or independent study, this approach involves working closely with students to teach research methodologies that advocate for community residents and address issues of concern to the community.



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Other service-learning models

The following other Models of Service-Learning have been presented by Kimet *al.*, (2007)

- **Placement model**

For this model, students go to an agency or service site multiple times, usually throughout the semester, and also the students tend to have direct contact with clients or issues. Students fulfill typical service roles, then they journal their experiences along the way. Building on this model, an example of placement model can be like taking a student to a mechanical garage where they spend some days with technicians repairing vehicle. The goal might be to improve practical skills. The students receive hands-on experience working with mechanics.

- **Project model**

With this model, students undertake a project on behalf of an agency. Sometimes this is a research project that contains everything that does not quite fit into other models. Based on this description, an example of Project Model can be like students in food biotechnologies class being engaged in a research project to determine the reason of the increase in child malnutrition in a region. The students visit nutrition centers and visit families to collect data about the nutrition status. The data collected are analyzed. Students receive hands-on experience conducting research and get firsthand information on what malnutrition is all about.

- **Product model**

For this model the students create a deliverable product for an agency or cause, using the skills and knowledge they are gaining in class. And also, the students usually do not work on the product at the agency. Often students work on the product as a group.

Example of Product Model: Students in our architecture class work on a logo for a recreational park in a local town. The students received all necessary information and product characteristics from the client, they design the logo and the client receives a marketing material.

- **Presentation model**

This is related the ability of individuals to learn and present what they are learning in order to deliver to other community members. It is linked to the ability to transfer the knowledge and skills learned. Learning is reinforced by having to “teach” course material to someone else in a real life setting.



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Types of Service Learning for University Students

The following list gives a sense of the four main ways students can apply instruction and practice needed skills through helping others (Butin, 2006):

- **Direct Service-Learning**

It is defined as person-to-person, face-to-face service projects in which the students' service directly impacts individuals who receive the service from the students. Examples: Tutoring other students and adults, conducting art/ music/ dance lessons for youth, giving presentations on violence and drug prevention, helping in a homeless shelter and creating life reviews for hospice patients, etc.

- **Indirect Service-Learning**

This is stated as working on broad issues, environmental projects, or community development projects that have clear benefits to the community or environment, but not necessarily to individually identified people with whom the students are working. Some examples include compiling a town history and removing invasive plants and restoring ecosystems in preserved areas for public use.

- **Research-Based Service-Learning**

It is also referred to gathering and presenting information on areas of interest and need projects that find, gather, and report on information that is needed. Here examples can be like writing a guide on available community services and translating it into other languages of new residents, conducting longitudinal studies of local bodies of water; water testing for local residents and gathering information and creating brochures or videos for non-profit or government agencies.

- **Advocacy Service-Learning**

Educating others about topics of public interest-projects that aim to create awareness and action on some issue that impacts the community. For example, conducting public information campaigns on topics of interest or local needs and working with elected officials to draft legislation to improve communities.

As can be observed based on the above models, SL at universities can be developed through different forms. It however requires, that the institution establishes mechanisms that allow smooth implementation including, but not limited to, time slots for extracurricular learning activities. Thus, the institution should:

- update its academic programs by including some courses related to SL that help students to know more about this new feature of SL
- encourage students to conduct different research-based projects that would enable them to meet/collaborate/interact with the community/society
- create or develop greater collaboration between Industry and Institutional programs in a such a way, that Industry provides internships for students, enabling them to get some needed practical skills
- encourage volunteerism-spirit and charity works within students as an easy way to enhance a deep collaboration between students and the community
- establish a department within institution in charge of Service-Learning related actions including monitoring and evaluation of their development



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