Frequently Asked Questions

- How is Service-Learning different from other types of practice-based education?
  - Clinicals, internships, student teaching, and co-op programs provide students with experience to develop professional skills. These typically occur during the senior year, after necessary coursework is completed, and depend on the emerging expertise of students. Service-Learning emphasizes the service contribution of students, rather than skill development per se, and students are prompted to learn course content from the community experiences. Service-Learning also has an explicit emphasis on civic responsibility, as students “serve to learn” in order to “learn to serve.”

- Will Service-Learning take too much faculty time?
  - It does take time to set up the logistics of a Service-Learning class, to respond to individual students, and to work through the unanticipated challenges of campus-community partnerships. However, there are ways to minimize the impact of the time by involving the expertise of the community agency, staff, former students, teaching assistants, and the CIE staff. It does get easier each time the course is taught as strong community learning partnerships develop over time.

- Does Service-Learning take too much class time?
  - The professor is still in charge of how class time is used. Students can reflect on the experience outside class through journals, logs, and more formal papers. However, research indicates that devoting some time in class to discussing experiences strengthens student learning and satisfaction with the course. If the students’ community experiences become “text” for the class, they will better integrate what they are learning as they make connections to course material and listen to themselves and their peers describe and analyze varied services and experiences.

- How do I evaluate the students’ performance?
  - Many instructors do not change their evaluation techniques, but assume that the service heightens student learning, and that monitoring the service contribution is all that is necessary. On the other hand, one might assign specific papers devoted to reflecting on the experience, and those could be graded for analysis, critical thinking, and other standards normally used. Faculty who utilize Service-Learning must generate data documenting the impact that the pedagogy has on student learning. Otherwise the question, “Why should I utilize Service-Learning if it doesn’t work any better than what I am already doing?” is a legitimate one. There are a number of outcomes that can be assessed, including the impact on student learning (e.g., academic skills, civic skills, life skills), the impact on the community (e.g., service delivery, client satisfaction), and the impact on the institution (e.g., faculty satisfaction, student learning). Since 2001, an annual International Conference on Service-Learning Research has provided opportunities for scholarly presentations on Service-Learning research.

- How can involvement in Service-Learning strengthen my dossier and scholarly work?
  - Many professional academic associations include sessions on Service-Learning at conferences. Others, such as the American Association of Higher Education or the Association of American Colleges and Universities, hold annual conferences with opportunities to present papers on Service-Learning. Some accreditation criteria, such as that of the North Central Association Higher Education Commission, now include civic engagement. Service-Learning course involvement also can reflect one’s professional research interests, especially when a strong partnership is created with a community agency. Documentation of student learning outcomes, course revisions overtime, and the impact of Service-Learning and community partnerships on scholarly pursuits are critical for promotion and tenure.

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