APPLES
Service-Learning

SERVICE-LEARNING SERIES: COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

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Service-Learning Series Overview

This pedagogy guide offers foundational information about service-learning practice and implementation. It serves as both reference documents and a set of primers on the possibilities for service-learning inside and outside of the classroom. The series provides information on planning and designing service-learning courses, developing community partnerships, resources for service-learning written reflections and examples of forms that facilitate service-learning activities.

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How Does Service-Learning Differ from Volunteering?

Service-Learning is:

"A method under which students… learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that: is conducted in and meets the needs of a community and is coordinated with… an institution of higher education…and with the community; helps foster civic responsibility; is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students… and includes structured time for the students…to reflect on the service experience."

~ National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993

Service-Learning differs from volunteering in two important ways:

1. Reciprocal benefit to students and community

Students learn as much from this experience as they do serve the community. In volunteerism, the benefit to community is emphasized over benefit to learner.

2. Guided and structured reflection embedded in coursework

In service-learning, students use their experiences to test the theories and knowledge learned in class and to connect what is learned in the classroom to real world needs. In order to articulate this application, students complete assignments that ask them to reflect on what they have learned, not just how they feel. These assignments are part of the course plan and should be graded. They may take the form of journaling, essays, presentations, portfolios, etc.

Community Partnership Models

There are many ways to incorporate service-learning and community engagement into the classroom. Below are a variety of models and approaches to service-learning to consider in course development.

Direct Service
Direct service activities are those that require personal contact with people in need. This type of service is generally the most rewarding for students because they receive immediate positive feedback during the process of helping others.

Indirect Service
Indirect service activities are centered in channeling resources to the problem rather than working directly with an individual who may need the service. Often students do not come in contact with the people they serve.

Both direct and indirect service are important in working with communities. It may be interesting to explore different student experiences across these two approaches during course discussions and in small groups.

Project-Based Service
Project-based service-learning involves students, often an entire class, working collectively on a particular project or issue in partnership with an organization. For example, students in a journalism course might produce a documentary film to be used as a marketing tool. Students in a social work course might organize a community forum around neighborhood economic development issues. In this model, faculty and students work closely with a community partner to design a specific service project related to the course concepts and skills. This model encourages teamwork and develops organizational skills. It also involves more direct supervision on the part of course instructor.

Community-Based Research
Community-based research (CBR) can be defined as a partnership of students, faculty and community partners who collaboratively engage in research with the purpose of solving a pressing community problem or affecting social change. Typical CBR projects include faculty, students and community partners working together to focus local attention on pressing community needs, research and evaluate new programs, evaluate and assess existing programs, or collaboratively develop qualitative and quantitative research tools.

How APPLES Can Help You Get Started

Connecting to Community Need: APPLES is connected to more than 250 organizations and has worked in the Triangle community for 25 years. Many times, community groups and organizations contact the office with specific needs that are then connected to specific disciplines and courses across the university.

Guiding the Partnership: The APPLES office can help faculty contact a new organization (one not already listed in Service-Learning Portal), attend an initial face-to-face partnership meeting (though this is not always necessary), and help create development partnership agreements.

Mediating Conflict: Though uncommon, there may be times when an organization, student or instructor does not feel the partnership is working well. APPLES staff is available to facilitate any discussion necessary to correct the issue after attempts have been made to communicate directly with the parties involved.

Funding: APPLES offers a variety of funding opportunities to help build and support service-learning in the classroom. For example, APPLES awards course development and course enhancements grants to faculty throughout the year. Additional funds are available to students enrolled in APPLES courses through partnership grants, aimed at deepening contributions to the community partner. For more information related to funding opportunities and application deadlines, visit the APPELS website, ccps.unc.edu/apples.

Best Practices of Service-Learning Partnerships

Set specific purpose and agreed upon mission, values, goals, deliverables and accountability
The first step toward agreement in these areas is to discover the questions that the community partner and instructor have each other. Instructors may have questions about the mission and strategies of the organization, and the community partner may have questions regarding the course goals, syllabus and student skills. Once perspectives and agendas are better understood, a negotiation and prioritization process should be used to distill the areas of mutual agreement that can be used to piece together the beginnings of a working relationship.

Assessment and evaluation
Assessment can be productive, even at the beginning of partnerships. Establishing a history of assessment will also pave the way for rigorous and meaningful evaluation as the partnership evolves. Gathering feedback is an effective way to show respect for partners, but incorporating that feedback into evaluation outputs and program design reflects a true appreciation of each partner's perspective.

Balance power and share resources
Many institutions assume that community partners hold limited power and that it's necessary for the institution to "build them up." However, this is rarely the case. Power dynamics must be carefully assessed and then, if necessary, methods of power redistribution should be considered. Once a more equitable balance of power is in place, resources can be more effectively shared. Partners should also be creative as to how resources are defined. Resources are not just financial, but can also include people, supplies, space or knowledge.

Clear, open and accessible communication
The key to any successful partnership is open communication. Email and regular in-person meetings strengthen working relationships. In addition, visiting partners on-site and in community, as well as inviting partners to class, helps everyone to better understand the work of the organization and the course.

Agree upon roles, norms and procedures
Many partnerships begin with discussing roles and procedures. However, if values and goals are not aligned, and if mutual trust and effective means of communication have not been established, the process design phase is unlikely to have successful, lasting results.

Partnerships evolve and can dissolve
Effective partnerships must have the capacity and patience to consider and embrace change as they develop. Partnerships can be viewed as living organisms that must be nurtured over time. Not all partnerships do or are meant to last forever, which needs to be acknowledged and anticipated.

Developing Community Partner Relationships

If you do not already have a partner in mind, work with APPLES to **find organizations** that have expressed needs that could be met through service-learning or have missions that complement your course's subject matter.

Once initial contact is made, APPLES recommends that instructors:

Meet partners face-to-face, preferably in the community.

Provide the organization staff with a copy of the syllabus. Partners want to know how their work fits into the course, overall objectives and learning goals for students. Partners often have expertise to share both in the form of readings and discussion if an instructor is open to including them in the course.

Allow the organization staff to decide what service students can provide. It shouldn't be assumed that instructors or students will know what a community organization needs. Rather than "pitch" a specific project, instructors should discuss the qualifications and skills that students possess and the assets of that community to be sure students are satisfying a true need in the community.

Determine the level of commitment that the organization is willing to give the service-learning partnership. APPLES encourages sustainable partnerships that last beyond the initial semester. Supervising service-learning volunteers requires time, oversight and feedback. It is important that the organization is able to provide students with the support they need.

Negotiate an agreement between the course and the organization that clearly articulates the expectations of all involved. This agreement can be formal or informal. However, there are many benefits to keeping a written account of expectations.

Communicate regularly with service-learning partners. Past community partners have expressed great disappointment with those relationships in which they were not contacted at regular intervals. Desired contact may mean calling or checking in by mid-semester and doing so periodically throughout the semester.

Invite community partners into the class process.

Continuously evaluate the success of the project. Include community partners as evaluators, as well as students. Solicit ideas for improvement.

Meeting with New Community Partners

Basics

What is Service-Learning?
• Provide a clear definition of service-learning, in particular, one that will help the community
  partner understand their role in service-learning.
• Provide examples of other courses that incorporate service-learning at UNC-Chapel Hill
• Help the organization to understand the differences between service-learning and volunteering.
• Emphasize the intent of a collaborative relationship, where both the university's and community
  partners' needs are met.

What is the course?
• If this is an existing course that is being reworked to include a service-learning component, share a
  copy of a previous syllabus.
• If this is a new course, ideas about content, learning objectives and student skills will be important
  to share.

Questions to consider when meeting:
Readiness of the organization for a service-learning partnership and starter questions:
• What experience does the community partner have in working with college students?
• What makes becoming a community partner in service-learning appealing to the organization?
• What are the major challenges the organization faces in providing services to the community?
• Does the organization see college students as a valuable resource?
• How much supervision will the organization be able to provide students?
• How readily could students apply their service to what they are learning in the classroom?
• Does the organization have the capacity to host and supervise your students? How many? Under
  what timeframe?

Initial meeting to-do list:
• Explore community and university assets and needs.
• Brainstorm projects to address mutual needs and desired outcomes.
• Consider a short-term project to begin building a trusting relationship. For example, a community
  partner may agree to collaborate for a semester as a trial for ongoing work.

Project Development:
• Over time, determine scope of project based on mutually identified needs.
• Develop shared mission statement and goals for project.
• Establish effective on-going communication and evaluation plan.
• Determine roles and responsibilities.
• Set next steps and a timeline.

Community Partnership Agreement

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This partnership agreement is designed to clarify the roles and responsibilities of _____ (community partner organization) and _____ (faculty/instructor) for _____ (course name and number) for the _____ (semester/year).

Description of service-learning project and instructor responsibilities (to be completed by course instructor):

Please attach a syllabus.

If direct service, tasks students will be expected to perform:

_____

_____

Number of hours per week: _____   Number of weeks during the semester: _____

If project-based, deliverables for the organization:

_____

_____

Timeline: _____

Expected amount of communication between students and organization representatives:

_____

_____

For both direct service and project-based service-learning:
Expected communication between the faculty/instructor and the organization contact:

_____

How the faculty/instructor will address issues with students who fail to meet organization expectations:
- Meet with student privately
- Meet with student and organization representative
- Meet with student and APPLES representative
- Alter course grade
- Other (describe below)

_____

_____

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Community partner responsibilities (to be completed by organization representative):
In this section please describe the needs of the organization that can be realistically filled by service-learners and the number of students the organization can support.

If direct service, please explain the organization's role in training and supervision of students:

_____

_____

_____

Expected communication between faculty/instructor and organization:

_____

_____

How the organization will address students who fail to meet expectations:

- Meet with student privately
- Meet with student and organization representative
- Meet with student and APPLES representative
- Alter course grade
- Other (describe below)

_____

_____

Organization Contact Information: Faculty Contact Information:

_____   _____
Community partner (name)   date   Faculty/instructor (name)   date

_____   _____
Phone   email   Phone   email

_____   _____
Community partner (signature)   date   Faculty/instructor (signature)   date