

## How to Design a Service Learning Course

### Developing a Service Learning Course Component

1. Identify course learning objectives that can be met or complemented by public service
  - a. What assignments would benefit from real-world data or case information?
  - b. What concepts would be more meaningful if students experienced them in a setting outside of class?
  - c. What professional and personal values and skills could be learned in the field?
2. List community organizations that are related to your class
  - a. What organizations and types of community-based experiences could help students to see the relevance and complexity of course material?
  - b. What existing community needs could be met through the skills and information you teach?
3. Envision relationships and responsibilities
  - a. Will service learning be an optional or required part of your class?
  - b. How many hours will you expect students to spend on service projects?
4. Integrate service learning into class assignments
  - a. Will students keep journals, write papers, or prepare presentations about their experience?
  - b. How can you bring service experiences back into the classroom through discussion and reflective exercises? How can you design exams, assignments, etc. that will make students' service-learning experiences analogous to the material they glean from their textbooks, readings, class discussions, research, and lab work?
  - c. How will you handle difficult situations (a placement not working out, students not interested in service, etc.)?
5. Read model syllabi available from several hundred courses across a variety a disciplines.  
[www.campuscompact.org/syllabi](http://www.campuscompact.org/syllabi)
6. Visit the Center for Teaching to consult our service-learning collection and read model syllabi created by UI faculty members
7. Talk to the Center for Teaching or the Community-Based Learning Program  
(<http://www.careers.uiowa.edu/cblp>) about your ideas

### **Ideas for Assessing Service Learning**

1. Ask students to schedule and keep track of their service hours as well as their activities.
2. Ask community partners if they would be willing to evaluate student performance as well as their organization's experience with service learning.
3. Assign papers, presentations, and tests that use service experiences to illustrate or enhance the factual material, principles, skills, and ethical issues addressed during the course. Like course readings, discussion, research, and lab work, service-learning experiences should enhance student knowledge and skills.
4. Require students to keep a journal that connects their service work to specific course objectives. Provide directed reflection questions and substantive feedback.
5. During lectures, discussions, and exams, ask students to draw on their service experiences as illustrations of more general concepts and principles.
6. Read students' reflective writing and surveys to evaluate their participation, the challenges they faced, and how they might enhance their service learning experience through future courses.
7. Design beginning, middle, and end-of-term quizzes that gauge the complexity of students' understanding of course material. Require them to respond in light of their efforts to plan and carry out their service work.

### **Service Learning: A Reflective Pedagogy**

A service learning course is most successful when students consider their experiences through rigorous reflection. Through reflective writing, discussion, and small group problem solving, students turn experience into education. The role of instructors is to provide disciplined structures that help students:

- Reflect on the relationship between academic content and their community experiences;
- Reflect on the concept of civic responsibility and their roles as members of a democratic society and an interconnected world;
- Challenge their assumptions about the community, the community organization, their role as students/scholars and community activists, and the course content; and
- Be accountable for their own learning and civic contributions.

### **Things to Remember**

- Both you and the students need to be flexible. Service may lead to unexpected results, complicated understandings, or even experiences that seem like a failure. How can your course make these circumstances instructive?
- Solidarity, not charity. Your students will benefit more than the people they serve; the goal is not to 'solve' problems, but to learn through relationships.
- Service learning will become more rewarding the more you do it. Learn from your students' experiences. "Mine" student writings and surveys to learn how to adjust their experiences and objectives for the course. As you implement service learning, think about ways to improve the experience next time for you, your students, and your community partners.