Regis University
Center for Service Learning

Rueckert-Hartman
College for Health Professions

Student Handbook

"Students, in the course of their formation, must let the gritty reality of this world into their lives, so they can learn to feel it, think about it critically, respond to its suffering and engage it constructively. They should learn to perceive, think, judge, choose, and act for the rights of others, especially the disadvantaged and oppressed."

- Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J.

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Section One: AN OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The information in this handbook is designed to guide students through the process of undertaking meaningful service-learning experiences. **Definitions, principles, and strategies are presented to contextualize the service learning experience for the student**. In addition, procedures for implementing service learning are outlined to ensure successful outcomes within the framework of using appropriate and effective methodology for meeting community needs.

DEFINITION AND SYNOPSIS

Definition

Service Learning is both a **philosophy of education** and a **method of teaching** that bridges the classroom and the community by **engaging learners** in the application of theory to service.

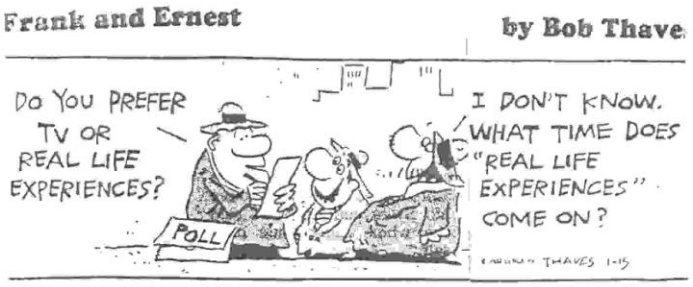
Synopsis

Service Learning is used in education to:

- solve community problems;
- enhance the common good;
- allow students a role in their own education;
- engage learners in actions which have real consequences;
- involve faculty in action research;
- improve teaching and assessment of course material; and
- provide inspiration for a way of knowing, which transcends already established facts.

Students who participate in service learning need to **follow a clear plan**, carefully researching resources and community needs. Additionally, students need to **establish structured time for reflection**, and **apply objective criticism** in assessing actions taken.

Everyone who participates in service learning is engaging in **experiential learning**, and outcomes are unique because the actions and interactions are as yet unknown. Being prepared for this kind of learning involves examining goals, researching the community, understanding the principles of good practice, establishing objectives, developing a learning/serving attitude, and planning for meaningful reflection of learning as it occurs.



OUTCOMES OF SERVICE LEARNING

To Prepare Better Citizens

Students who participate in community service are likely to have a better understanding of their communities, challenge their prejudices, expand their view of culture and society, develop more realistic attitudes about citizen involvement, and be more prepared to take leadership roles in their communities in the future. Instructors and administrators are more likely to see themselves and their institution as partners in the local community and to foster that attitude in their students.

To Meet Community Needs

Educational institutions are in a position to have major impacts on real needs in their neighborhoods. Given the diversity of expertise of faculty and the resources available for research and study, the communities are likely to gain immensely from the focus of inquiry based on their needs. An example would be a faculty member in Nutrition Science organizing students and faculty to study nutritional deficiencies of a local population and to make recommendations for improving diet. Thus, a more studied approach to service enhances the service provided.

To Foster Partnerships

Community and education partnerships can be formed for mutually beneficial uses of resources. Instructors and students from diverse disciplines can join together on community research or service to learn collaboration, to learn how the areas of study are similar, diverse, or interrelated, and can provide a more stable framework for educational sustainability.

> "Real education should educate us out of self into something far finer; into a selflessness which links us with all humanity."
> - Lady Nancy Astor,
> English politician, first female member of the British Parliament

To Add Value to the Role of Student

Many students are at a stage in their lives where they are seeking a purpose and want to understand their role in society. Service learning provides individuals with a way to move into the center of community issues, to be a part of the solution rather than the problem, and to develop a sense of person.

To Enhance Learning

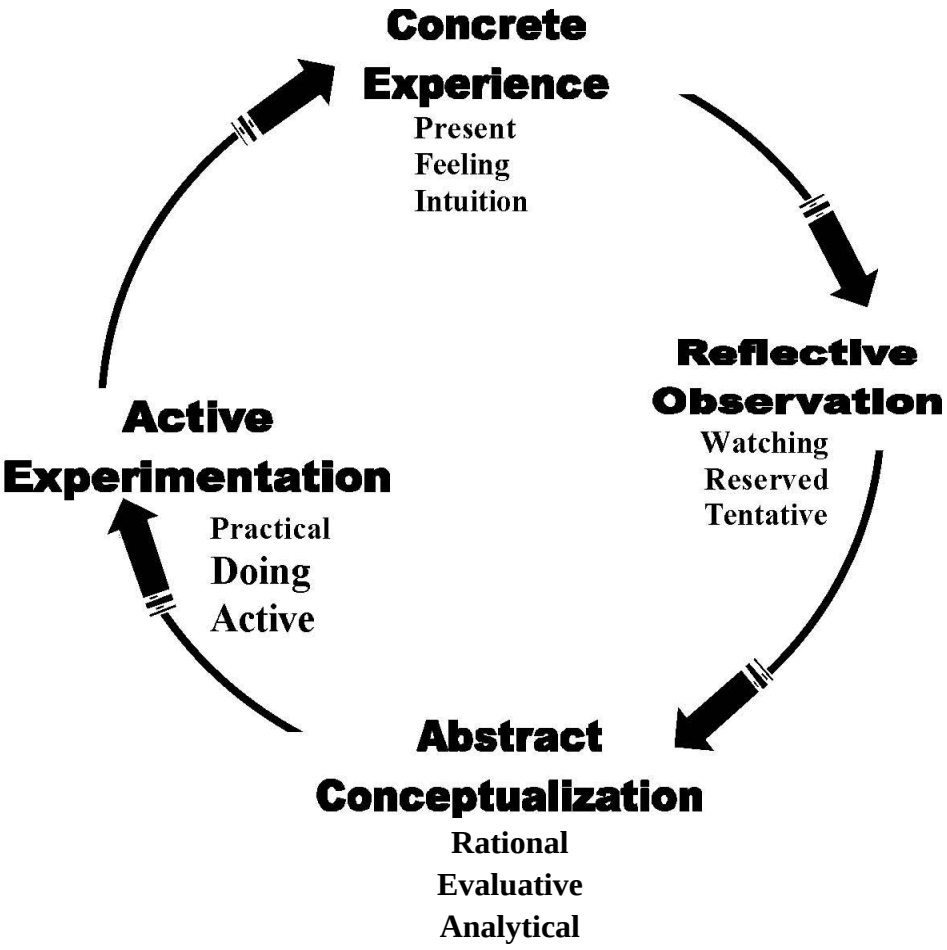
Service learning is a teaching method that can stimulate creative thinking, problem solving, and critical thinking. Students who are engaged in service are more likely to develop skills such as critical reflection, analysis, synthesis, integration, application, and comprehension as well as become more open-minded about others' ideas, and to be more engaged in their learning process.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THEORY

In David Kolb's *Experiential Learning* (1984), he describes the experiential learning theory as "a **holistic integrative perspective** on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition and behavior." Kolb defines learning as "a process that begins with the here-and-now experience followed by collection of data and observations about that experience. The data are then analyzed and the conclusions of this analysis are fed back to the actors in the experience for their use in the modification of their behavior and choice of new experiences."

Experiential learning can thus be viewed as a cycle with four interrelated stages: "Immediate **concrete experience** is the basis for **observation and reflection**. These observations are assimilated into a 'theory' (**abstract conceptualization**) from which new implications for action can be deduced. These implications or hypotheses then serve as guides in acting to create new experiences (**active experimentation**)."

The emphasis in experiential learning is on the process of learning as opposed to the outcomes of learning; the purpose of education is seen as stimulation of inquiry rather than accumulation of facts.



Section Two: THE PROCESS

ASK YOURSELF "WHY?"

Before beginning service of any form, it is important to ask yourself several key questions about the motivation and understanding which has brought you to decide to become involved in service to the community.

Take time to answer these questions thoroughly. Write your answers down. Be honest, and save these responses to review throughout your experiences.

1. Why does this service appeal to me?
2. What do I hope to get out of the experience?
3. What is my attitude about giving/receiving service?
4. What experiences have I had that I can bring to this situation?
5. What are my reservations about this service activity?
6. What are my strengths?
7. What are my weaknesses?
8. What kind of commitment am I willing to make to this project?

"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."
- Archbishop Desmond Tutu

"Stay committed to your decisions, but stay flexible in your approach."
- Tom Robbins

"Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other one thing."
- Abraham Lincoln

If we're growing, we're always going to be out of our comfort zone."
- John Maxwell

FIND OUT THE BASICS

Community Needs

You should understand that the community does not need anyone to arrive with solutions; what is needed is someone who is willing to learn and willing to contribute to solutions. Before you begin your service, find out the following:

1. What needs exist? How do I know this?
2. What services/resources exist?
3. How can I contribute?

The answers to the above may come from the agency, from your faculty (if he/she has already done a needs assessment), or may need to be researched by you as part of the service project (i.e., asking participants what their needs are and how they wish for you to help). If you are going to be involved in completing a needs assessment, you will want to review the literature, talk with your faculty, and talk with community agency professionals to guide your work.

Exploring Agency Needs

Before beginning a partnership with a community agency, find out the following basic information about their role:

1. What is the mission statement of this agency?
2. What services are provided by this agency?
3. What professional staff works at this agency? What are their roles?

Assessing Your Role

Most community agencies have professional standards and expectations for all employees and volunteers in their agency. Be sure to find out the following:

1. What will my responsibilities be?
2. What is my work schedule and how does this fit with the work schedule of the other agency personnel (starting time/breaks/closing time, etc.)?
3. What is the expected attire?
4. Will I have a workspace? If so, what responsibilities will I have in relation to it?
5. How is the telephone answered? Who greets visitors? How?
6. Where should I park?
7. To whom do I report? Do I keep time records? How?
8. What other rules/procedures should I know about?

DEVELOP OBJECTIVES

Service-learning is complex in that the learner must combine previous knowledge with new knowledge, interpret data in spontaneous situations, face conflicts of theory and practice, and test skills in a totally new framework (i.e. without direct feedback from faculty, without time to reflect before responding, without the safety net of hypothetical consequences). In order to provide the best opportunity for that learning to be effective, you should plan your learning objectives before you begin your service.

Learning objectives are measurable and achievable outcomes of the experience, which you plan to accomplish. They are statements of what you expect to achieve by the end of the learning project. Some examples of learning objectives (for a service-learning project on literacy) could include:

By the conclusion of my service-learning project on literacy, I plan…

- To be able to cite three causes of illiteracy.
- To have a basic understanding of the difficulties related to employment for someone who cannot read.
- To have knowledge about the services available in our community for someone who is illiterate.
- To know the appropriate terminology related to this community issue.
- To have direct feedback from the participants regarding what they see as their needs.
- To be able to describe the mission of the agency in which I will be working.

PLAN FOR REFLECTION

As you proceed around the experiential learning cycle from concrete experiences to reflective observation, you should begin to take time to think about those things you have experienced. You will have a wide variety of feelings and observations. In order to learn the most from your service learning, you may want to plan some reflective sessions to capture your reactions while they are fresh.

There are many different ways to engage in critical reflection. Any method, which helps you to carefully think about what you have experienced, can be utilized. The goal of reflection is to process what you have seen and heard in your service role, and to begin to think about what it means, what actions can be taken, what obstacles exist to action, etc. Some examples of reflection techniques are listed below:

1. **A reflective journal** – this is not a diary; it is a **written** collection of your **reactions** to what you have seen, problems you have encountered, **insights** you have gained through your experiential learning, and methods you have tried to make sense of the community issues. Questions you could ask yourself as you design your journal can be found in the Appendix.

2. **Group discussions** – if you are doing your service as part of a class, this may already be part of the plan. If not, or if you are doing an independent project, try to gather with other service-learners to **discuss** what you are learning. Ask yourselves standard debriefing questions (what happened, what does it mean and now what will I do with this information) as a way of organizing your discussions.

3. **Paint, Draw, Dance** – express your reactions in a **creative format** if this is a helpful reflective method for you. Focus on what things mean to you, not what you expect others to gain from your expressions.

The key to reflection is that it provides a point to stop, review, and then to begin to act again with added insight. This will not happen unless you plan reflection time. Spend at least 30 minutes after each service-learning action to process what happened, what it means to you and what you will do with this knowledge. Don't forget: write*, talk, or create!!* **This is the most critical stage in the experiential learning cycle.**

ESTABLISH AN ASSESSMENT PLAN

If your service learning is part of a class, the instructor may arrange your assessment. However, if you are doing a project independently or participating with your instructor in your assessment, you should plan your strategy for assessment before beginning your service.

Assessment of your service learning is simply an evaluation of the work you performed and the learning, which occurred as a result of the experience. Your learning plan and objectives generally become the basis for assessment. In other words, how well did you meet your objectives and accomplish your plan?

Be creative in thinking about the assessment process. You know what you would like to express about what you have learned. Discuss this with your instructor if you want to expand the process.

COMMIT TO A SERVICE LEARNING CONTRACT

As you prepare to implement service learning, commit to the following:

- To contribute in ways that are needed
- To share your ideas
- To listen
- To follow agency procedures
- To appreciate diversity
- To show everyone respect
- To avoid the entanglements of office politics, gossip, etc.
- To be willing to say "I don't know"
- To accept that others may make mistakes and let them own their own mistakes
- To look for and respect the strength in each individual
- To look for the deeper social meaning underlying community problems
- To try to make connections to classroom learning
- To enhance the common good

CONTACT INFORMATION

Please direct any inquiries regarding this Handbook to:

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Section Three: APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Pre-Experience

Why does this service appeal to me?

What do I hope to get out of the experience?

What is my attitude about giving/receiving service?

What experiences have I had that I can bring to this situation?

What are my reservations about this service activity?

What are my strengths?

What are my weaknesses?

What kind of commitment am I willing to make to this project?

How do you define community?

As an educated, privileged citizen in our society, what is my role in creating a society rooted in equality and justice?

Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J. said the purpose of exposing students to real issues of the world as part of Jesuit Education is so:
"Students, in the course of their formation, must let the gritty reality of this world into their lives, so they can learn to feel it, think about it critically, respond to its suffering and engage it constructively. They should learn to perceive, think, judge, choose, and act for the rights of others, especially the disadvantaged and oppressed."
Do you see your service experience contributing in any way to the above and how?

During/Post-Experience

How has this experience contributed to your growth and ability to partner with other professionals to serve the community in the future?

What was the best/worst/most challenging thing that happened?

Discuss a social problem that you have come in contact with during your service work. What do you think are the root causes of this problem? Explain how your service may or may not contribute to its alleviation?

What have you learned about yourself?

What can you do differently as an individual, and as a professional to support and advocate for some of the issues you encountered during your service experience?

Name three things that stuck in your mind about the service experience.

If you were one of the people receiving services, what would you think of yourself?

What connections do you see between this experience and your classroom learning for this course?

How did this experience challenge your assumptions and stereotypes?

Describe an internal or external conflict that has surfaced for you during your service work. Explain factors that contribute to it and how you might resolve or cope with the conflict.

APPENDIX B: SERVICE LEARNING FORMS

The following links will connect you to the forms that you will use in your course:

- Service Learning Contract - http://regis.edu/content/ars/pdf/Service-LearningContract.pdf
- Service Learning Time Log - http://regis.edu/content/ars/pdf/TimeLog.pdf