

What is Service-Learning?

The *National Center for Service-Learning* defines service-learning through three key characteristics:

1. Service-learning constitutes activity that is focused on meeting a human need in the community where that need has to do with the well-being of individuals and/or of the environment in which they live.
2. Key academic and/or civic objectives to be achieved through combining service with learning have been identified prior to the activity.
3. Opportunities for students to reflect on their experience and its connection to specific academic/civic objectives are incorporated into the activity.

Please visit the *National Service-Learning Clearinghouse* website for other definitions and characteristics of service-learning: <http://www.servicelearning.org/>

“Service-learning seeks to engage individuals in activities that combine both community service and academic learning. Because service-learning programs are typically rooted in formal courses (core academic, elective, or vocational), the service activities are usually based on particular curricular concepts that are being taught.”

Andrew Furco, "Is Service-Learning Really Better than Community Service?" in Furco, Andrew and Shelley H. Billig, eds. Service-Learning: The Essence of the Pedagogy. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing Inc. 2002. p. 25

“Service-learning is a teaching method which combines community service with academic instruction as it focuses on critical, reflective thinking and civic responsibility. Service-learning programs involve students in organized community service that addresses local needs, while developing their academic skills, sense of civic responsibility, and commitment to the community.”

Campus Compact National Center for Community Colleges

“Service-learning is a credit-bearing, educational, experience in which students 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.”

Robert Bringle and Julie Hatcher, A Service Learning Curriculum for Faculty. The Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning, Fall 1995, pp.112-122

“Service-learning combines service objectives with learning objectives with the intent that the activity change both the recipient and the provider of the service. This is accomplished by combining service tasks with structured opportunities that link the task to self-reflection, self-discovery, and the acquisition and comprehension of values, skills, and knowledge content.”

The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, <http://www.servicelearning.org/>

“Service-learning is the [name for the] various pedagogies that link community service and academic study so that each strengthens the other. The basic theory of service-learning is Dewey’s: the interaction of knowledge and skills with experience is key to learning. Students learn best not by reading the Great Books in a closed room but by opening the doors and windows of experience. Learning starts with a problem and continues with the application of increasingly complex ideas and increasingly sophisticated skills to increasingly complicated problems.”

Thomas Ehrlich, in Barbara Jacoby and Associates. Service-Learning in Higher Education: Concepts and Practices. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bas, 1996.

“Service-learning is a credit-bearing, educational experience in which students: 1) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified on- and off-campus community needs and 2) 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.”

<http://www.byui.edu/ServiceLearning/subpages/fgdefinition.htm>

“Service Learning is a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development.”

<http://www.estrellamountain.edu/servicelearning/sldefinition.asp>

“[Service-learning is an] academic experiential educational method in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflects on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, develop critical thinking skills, and develop an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.”

<http://www.servicelearning.eku.edu/>

“A service-learning program provides educational experiences:

- Under which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet actual community needs and that are coordinated in collaboration with school and community;
- That are integrated into the students’ academic curriculum or provide structured time for a student to think, talk, or write about what the student did and saw during the actual service activity;
- That provides students with opportunities to use newly-acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their own communities; and
- That enhance what is taught by extending student learning beyond the classroom and into the community and helps to foster the development of a sense of caring for others.”

Retrieved from the Commission on National and Community Service (now the Corporation for National and Community Service). In Richard J. Kraft and James Krug, “Review of Research and Evaluation on Service Learning in Public and Higher Education,” 1994.

“Service Learning is a teaching and learning methodology that connects classroom curriculum with identified community issues and needs. Service Learning engages students in projects that serve the community and build their social and academic capacities.”

<http://servicelearning.cps.k12.il.us/>

“Service-learning is a teaching method that combines community service with academic instruction as it focuses on critical, reflective thinking and civic responsibility.”

<http://www.cofc.edu/~servicelearning/facstaff/>

“Service-learning is an] educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets community-identified needs. Students reflect on the service activity to increase understanding and application of course content and to enhance a sense of civic responsibility.”

<http://www.vcu.edu/ocp/programs/servicelearning/whatis/index.html>

“Service-learning is the pedagogy that links academic study with the practical experience of community service. Service-learning unites academic study and volunteer community service in mutually reinforcing ways.”

<http://www.volunteeringinternational.org/advocacy/declaration-of-principles.html>

“Service Learning is a structured learning experience within an academic course. The service work is directed toward the achievement of course learning objectives and also toward making meaningful contributions to the areas of need identified by the community being served.”

[http://www.csusm.edu/ocsl/CSL%20Info/Def%20of%20CSL\(F\).htm](http://www.csusm.edu/ocsl/CSL%20Info/Def%20of%20CSL(F).htm)

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Combining Service and Learning

An effective and sustained service-learning program:

- Engages people in responsible and challenging actions for the common good.
- Provides structured opportunities for people to reflect critically on their service experience.
- Articulates clear service and learning goals for everyone involved.
- Allows for those with needs to define those needs.
- Clarifies the responsibilities of each person and organization involved.
- Matches service providers and service needs through a process that recognizes changing circumstances.
- Expects genuine, active, and sustained organizational commitment.
- Includes training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition, and evaluation to meet service and learning goals.
- Ensures that the time commitment for service and learning is flexible, appropriate, and in the best interest of all involved.
- Is committed to program participation by and with diverse populations.

Jane Kendall & Associates (1990). *Combining Service and Learning*. Raleigh, NC: National Society for Internships and Experiential Education (Now named: National Society for Experiential Education).

Retrieved from: <http://www.compact.org/publications/detail2.php?id=5>

Service-Learning Benefits

Service-Learning benefits **students** by:

- Linking theory to practice
- Deepening understanding of course materials
- Enhancing the sense of civic responsibility through civic engagement
- Allowing students to explore possible career paths
- Stressing the importance of improving the human condition
- Developing relevant career-related skills
- Providing experience in group work and interpersonal communication
- Promoting interaction with people from diverse backgrounds
- Instilling a sense of empowerment that enhances self-esteem

Service-Learning benefits **faculty** by:

- Providing exciting new ways to teach familiar material
- Offering professional development challenges
- Engaging faculty in meaningful interactions with the community at large
- Encouraging faculty to form close, interactive, mentoring relationships with students
- Reminding faculty of the direct consequences of their teaching for society
- Connecting faculty across academic disciplines through a shared approach to teaching

Service-Learning benefits **communities** by:

- Forming partnerships that foster positive campus-community interactions
- Providing access to faculty experts and the next generation of experts
- Identifying, addressing, and solving local problems in effective, creative ways
- Cultivating future generations of engaged citizens
- Encouraging multi-generational and cross-cultural interactions
- Establishing cooperation and collaboration as values within the local culture

Service-Learning Outcomes for Learners:

- Learning does not necessarily come from the experience of service alone, but from reflection on and creating meaning from that experience
- Service-learning can help young people grow from the natural dependence and egocentrism of childhood into mature personal interdependence and engagement in community
- Young people who serve learn holistically. All functions of personality contribute to development of the self
- Students learn and grow as they feel and think about service experiences (i.e., through behavior, affect and cognition). Because learning begins with behavior, students gain efficacy and self-direction
- Service-learning empowers youth to become service-oriented citizens and leaders
- Students who serve develop communication and leadership skills which aid in their ability to apply what they learn to the “real world”
- Service-learning participation has an impact on such academic outcomes as demonstrated complexity of understanding, problem analysis, critical thinking, and cognitive development
- Service-learning contributes to career development

Service-Learning Outcomes for Education:

- Service-learning addresses many key education reform objectives
- Benefits to schools include provision of valuable services and an enhanced school climate
- Partnerships between schools and communities, which result in citizen and community development, enhance public relations
- Service-learning can improve student satisfaction with the college
- Students engaged in service-learning are more likely to graduate

Service-Learning Outcomes for the Community:

- Service-learning contributes to community development and renewal
- Recipients of service benefit from direct aid, human involvement, and personal empowerment
- Agencies receive an infusion of creativity and enthusiasm from participating students
- Service-learning helps students become invested in their communities as community-minded citizens
- As students contribute through service to meet a community need, they are seen to be one of the community’s greatest resources

Social Outcomes of Service-Learning:

- Service-learning has a positive effect on reducing stereotypes and facilitating cultural and racial understanding
- Service-learning may subvert as well as support course goals of reducing stereotyped thinking and facilitating cultural and racial understanding
- Service-learning has a positive effect on sense of social responsibility and citizenship skills
- Service-learning during college has a positive effect on commitment to life-long service and volunteering

Retrieved and compiled from:

Cairn, R. & J. Kielsmeier, eds. (1995). *Growing Hope: A Sourcebook on Integrating Youth Service into the School Curriculum*. St Paul, MN: National Youth Leadership Council.

Eyler, J., D. Giles, C. Stenson, and C. Gray. (2001). *At a Glance: What We Know about the Effects of Service-Learning on College Students, Faculty, Institutions, and Communities*. Vanderbilt University.