FINDING COMMUNITY: DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING EFFECTIVE INTERGENERATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS

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As intergenerational service-learning becomes an increasingly popular means for providing gerontology and health professional students with “real-life” experience, it is essential to consider the importance of strong community partnerships. Drawing upon a range of intergenerational service-learning experiences from two programs at different universities in the Midwest, this article examines the role of community partners in intergenerational service-learning and offers strategies for developing and maintaining effective community partnerships.

Intergenerational service-learning is becoming increasingly popular in gerontology and health professions education as a way to provide students with “real-life” experience (Clark, 1999; Fisher & Finkelstein, 1999; Karasik & Berke, 2001; Karasik, Maddox, & Wallingford, 2004). Considerable attention has been given to the benefits of providing service-learning opportunities to students (Blieszner &
Artale, 2001; Clark, 1999; McCrea, Nichols, & Newman, 1998, 1999, 2000; Westacott & Hegeman, 1996). Developing a successful service-learning program, however, poses a variety of challenges. In particular, it is essential to consider the role community partners play in supporting intergenerational service-learning. Using illustrations from intergenerational service-learning experiences in a gerontology program and an occupational therapy (OT) program at two different Midwest universities, this article offers practical strategies for developing and maintaining effective community service-learning experiences. In particular, this article focuses on defining the essential elements of intergenerational service-learning, finding and forming effective community partnerships, and maintaining and sustaining established community linkages.

INTERGENERATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING OVERVIEW

Essential Elements of Service-Learning

Several comprehensive sources are available for those unfamiliar with the basics of service-learning (Furco, 1996; Heffernan, 2001; Howard, 1993, 1998; Rhoads & Howard, 1998; Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999). The pedagogical goal of service-learning, like other forms of experiential learning, is to engage students in hands-on activities designed to provide opportunities for learning and development (Flannery & Ward, 1999; Howard, 1993, 1998). Typically, experiential learning activities are directed toward either student learning (e.g., internships and field work) or community outcomes (e.g., volunteerism and community service) (Furco, 1996; Jacoby, 1996). Service-learning, however, is unique in that it seeks to balance equally the learning needs of students with the service needs of the community (Furco, 1996; Karasik, 2005a).

On the service side, essential elements that set service-learning apart from other forms of experiential learning include having students provide service that is meaningful and meeting a need or goal that has been defined by the community (Weigert, 1998). Thus, it is up to the community to help decide what type of service it needs. On the learning side, it is essential that the service provided by students be closely related to the overall goals of the course. Ongoing reflection, in the form of assignments which help students integrate their service experiences with the course objectives, is also vital (Weigert, 1998). Finally, consideration must be given to service-learning assessment. From a grading perspective, one must take into account Howard’s (1993) principle that learning, not service, should be the
basis of academic credit. Beyond student grades, however, there are many other outcomes of service-learning to be assessed. These include overall satisfaction of the student, faculty, and community partners, as well as the impact of service on both the students and the community.

Incorporating these elements into effective community-based learning programs is a practice that can take many forms (Heffernan, 2001). There is no single way to approach service-learning. Rather, it is understood that both the learning goals for the students and the needs of the community will shape the resulting program. In fact, if done properly, service-learning programs are likely to be ever-changing as the needs of the constituencies evolve (Karasik, 2005a; Karasik et al., 2004).

**Service-Learning in Gerontology**

Pedagogically, service-learning is open to any number of fields. Human service fields such as gerontology and the health professions, however, are particularly well suited to service-learning (Karasik & Berke, 2001). McCrea et al. (1998, 1999, 2000) have documented a number of case studies of intergenerational service-learning programs, with examples ranging from distance learning models in graduate programs (Bartmann, 1999) to working with nontraditional students at a large university (Teaford, 1999) to varying approaches of working with undergraduates in introductory aging courses (Hamon & Way, 2000; Steitz & Barone, 1998).

Numerous benefits of providing service-learning opportunities to students in the field of aging have been identified, including increasing students’ understanding of the aging process (Blieszner & Artale, 2001; Knapp & Stubblefield, 2000; Whitbourne, Collins, & Skultety, 2001), dispelling myths about aging and older persons (Blieszner & Artale, 2001; Karasik & Berke, 2001), providing greater knowledge about elder care and human service issues (Westacott & Hegeman, 1996), improving attitudes toward older workers (Hanks & Icenogle, 2001), and reinforcing career choices (Blieszner & Artale, 2001; Karasik & Berke, 2001).

Along with these benefits, various challenges in implementing intergenerational service-learning have also been documented (Karasik, 2005b). These challenges range from obtaining institutional and faculty support (Bucco & Busch, 1996; Henry, Brook, & Lazarus, 2002; Rubin, 1996) to getting students (Karasik, 2005a; Karasik et al., 2004; Nichols & Monard, 2001) and communities (Gugerty & Swezey, 1996) involved. The current article focuses on the latter
challenge of developing sustainable community partnerships for effective intergenerational service-learning.

**FINDING AND FORMING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

With the growth of the aging population, there is an immense variety of opportunities for intergenerational service-learning. Potential community partners include adult day care facilities, community groups, community mental health organizations, senior housing communities, senior centers, YMCAs, assisted living facilities, and long-term care facilities (Pearlman & Wallingford, 2003).

There are a number of factors to consider when forming intergenerational service-learning partnerships. First and foremost, it is important to keep in mind that relationships are works in progress. Before these discussions can begin, however, potential partners must first find each other.

*Finding a Partner*

Like other types of relationships, some service-learning partnerships just happen. More often, however, the process is akin to finding a suitable mate. The first challenge is determining where to begin the search for a compatible partner. In developing their service-learning program, Henry et al. (2002) followed the belief that they should “work with the community in which a university is located” (p. 18). Benefits from this approach include minimizing travel time for the collaborating partners and increasing the ease of placing and monitoring students in their community sites. Local university-community relations might also benefit from this approach.

Working with communities beyond the immediate area, however, may offer certain advantages as well. These include access to more diverse populations, willing partners, and a wider range of service opportunities. Adding community partners from a wider region may also help to alleviate participation barriers for heavily employed and/or commuting students (Karasik, 2005a). Whatever the location of the partner, it should be safe and accessible to students either by car or public transportation.

*Getting to Know Each Other*

Once a potential partner has been identified, tentative collaboration discussions are likely to begin with partners getting to know more about each other. For faculty, this may mean getting to know not just
the community partner representatives, but also the tenor and needs of the community as a whole. As Gugerty and Swezey (1996) point out:

> It is incumbent on each college and university to learn about the community in which it resides or with which it intends to develop a relationship. This involves learning about the history and unique contributions of the particular neighborhood or community. It also entails understanding the rich traditions and values of its various ethnic, racial, and class cultures and how they influence the community (p. 93).

In the best possible scenario, community representatives should also explore their understanding of the workings and needs of academia. Long-standing images of universities as ivory towers may lead some to the expectation that faculty is out of touch with the real world. Others may have limited knowledge regarding the multiple faculty responsibilities of teaching, research, committee work, and university administration.

University-community collaborations must also consider the “student factor” in the getting-to-know-you process. While many communities appreciate the abilities and resources students bring with them, some may have concerns based on isolated experiences or long-held stereotypes about negative student behaviors (e.g., irresponsibility, drinking, inappropriate dress) that need to be addressed (Karasik, 2002). Many of these concerns can be eased with open and frank discussions between the partners. It may also be helpful to provide community partners with a syllabus and information about the course along with a full description of faculty expectations for service-learning students (e.g., service goals and objectives, minimum hours of commitment, and any trouble-shooting measures that are in place).

In addition to addressing community concerns about students, it is also important for agencies to be aware of students’ concerns including their need for flexible scheduling, their possible apprehension of working with older adults, and of taking on professional-type responsibilities. Outlining opportunities for scheduling, student orientation, training, and ongoing support and supervision can help agencies allay such concerns. Potential partners, however, also need to consider the extent to which assistance will be necessary and whether appropriate resources and staffing are available. The amount and type of assistance required will depend upon both the nature of the service assignment and the level and ability of the students (Karasik et al., 2004).
Building a Relationship

A large part of relationship building has to do with establishing balance and trust. Gugerty and Swezey (1996) suggest that faculty venturing out into the community adopt an approach similar to the “medical profession’s ethical commitment to ‘do no harm’ as their fundamental guiding principle” (p. 95). This is of particular importance when involving potentially vulnerable populations such as frail older adults. A community partner whose primary focus is serving older adults, for example, may be concerned that their clients will be exploited as a teaching tool. Open communication is essential between the partners regarding all potential outcomes and concerns. Protocols should be agreed upon before beginning a service-learning program to protect all the constituencies involved. These protocols should then be revisited along with new concerns on a regular basis.

The Community-Campus Partnership for Health (CCPH), in defining its principles for good community-campus partnerships, also emphasizes the importance of “clear, open and accessible communication between partners” (Seifer and Maurana, 2000, p. 8). All of the partners need to be involved in the ongoing processes of identifying needs, establishing common goals, and providing feedback. It is vital to recognize that service-learning needs and goals can and will change over time, sometimes leaving partners out of sync with each other. Establishing a rapport based in mutual trust and respect will help to facilitate communication when such challenges arise.

Communication alone, however, is not always enough to maintain a trusting, balanced partnership. It is important for partners to discuss how they each see their roles in the partnership and what each side is able and willing to commit. Partners must perceive that the relationship is equitable, with power and resources being shared. Unfortunately, many institutions are not equipped with policies that ease the sharing of resources (especially monetary resources). Often, creative approaches are called for. Students in the OT program encountered one such challenge when conducting craft and activity groups at an adult day care facility. While neither the program nor the University could provide funding for supplies up front, students were able to inventory existing supplies at both the school and the facility prior to planning the activity group. The students also found that both the school and the facility could, with prior approval, reimburse them for a few additional inexpensive supplies. As a result, the students were able to conduct a successful activity with contributions from both the school and the facility.
Relationship balance and equity can be maintained in other ways as well. For example, it is important to recognize and honor the “in kind” contributions (e.g., time, planning, supervision, staffing, publicity, space) that each partner provides. Similarly, it is vital for partners to share credit for the collaboration’s achievements (Seifer & Maurana, 2000). Specific recognition strategies will be discussed subsequently.

Identifying Mutually Beneficial Tasks

The essence of service-learning is that the outcomes should benefit students and the community equally. True collaboration requires commitment to working toward mutually beneficial goals. Thus, the activities that students engage in are dependent on both the goals and objectives of the course as well as the community partner’s needs. Identifying mutually beneficial tasks is a challenge requiring each partner to carefully consider their needs and expectations.

From an academic point of view, service-learning is often pursued as a way to add experiential content to courses and to provide students with real life experiences. A starting point for faculty, thus, is to identify the specific learning goals and objectives for their course and for the service experience. A second step is to assess the types of learning activities which may be used to accomplish these goals and objectives.

Learning goals for service-learning can be general or very specific. To meet a general goal such as “developing an understanding of the older population,” one approach is to offer students an array of experiential options. For example, in an introductory gerontology course, these may include visiting with an older person in a senior housing or assisted living facility, running errands for an older person in the community, or delivering meals on wheels (Karasik & Berke, 2001). In other instances, objectives may be more specific like “developing interviewing skills.” Helping out with intake interviews at a retirement facility or interviewing older adults about their life story incorporates these skills. Activities that develop skills in group leadership include leading a craft, cooking, or exercise group at a senior center or assisted living facility. For example, in an occupational therapy course, OT students were able to interact with older adults in an adult day care facility and provide health education, exercise, craft, and current events groups. Through these experiences, students not only learned about interacting with older adults but gained skills in leading groups as well. In return, the older adults received health information and intergenerational activity.
Community partners must also develop goals and objectives for service-learning. Some agencies enter into a partnership with specific tasks in mind. For example, they may have older clients requesting assistance with activities such as shopping, exercise, or computer training. Alternatively, staff requests may be the impetus for student assistance with suggested activities including developing education modules, conducting surveys, or providing friendly visitors and outside entertainment for older participants.

In other situations, community partners enter the service-learning partnership with broader goals and objectives that then must be translated into specific activities. For example, one multilevel senior housing partner expressed interest in providing their tenants with intergenerational interaction. Students in an Introduction to Gerontology class worked with both the agency’s volunteer coordinator and participating older adults to design activities that would be of mutual interest. One activity that evolved from this process was an intergenerational cooking class where the senior participants taught the college students how to prepare local ethnic specialties. The semester-long experience culminated in an intergenerational potluck in the facility’s dining hall. This activity resulted in meeting both the agency’s desire for positive intergenerational interaction and the class’ service-learning objective of providing students with face to face interaction with older persons in order to familiarize students with a realistic, personalized, and diverse experience of being older.

**WORKING TOGETHER**

Developing a strong partnership requires good communication and, often, a lot of paperwork. Establishing the logistical components of each partner’s roles, responsibilities, and legal requirements is essential to a successful collaboration. Specific areas to consider include the facilitation of student placements and the development of appropriate record-keeping procedures.

**Community Partner’s Role in Attracting Students**

Intergenerational service-learning may be a requirement for a course or offered as an elective experience in a course. When service-learning is an elective experience in a course, a student typically gets to choose between the service-learning project or some equally comprehensive assignment. In either instance, the community partner can play a large role in attracting students for the service-learning project. One way to promote service-learning and to facilitate communication
between students and agencies is to invite community representatives to speak to students about service-learning opportunities (Karasik, 2002). Such in-class presentations serve several functions, not the least of which is putting a human face on an otherwise unknown agency. Midterm feedback from students in a recent Introduction to Gerontology class indicated that the in-class presentations left them feeling more interested, willing, and comfortable with participating in service-learning. As one student noted “(the presenters) had lots of positive energy about (their agency) and has a lot of interest in sharing their knowledge.” Similarly, another student indicated “I felt like they wanted me.”

Agency representatives can further stimulate student interest in service-learning by distributing take-home materials at these sessions describing themselves and the potential service opportunities that the agency has available. This information might include, among other items, a brief overview of the types of services the agency provides and the population they serve; examples of specific types of activities students might be doing; times that students might be needed at the agency (e.g., days/nights/weekends); and opportunities for special, one-time projects. It is also helpful if students are provided with a description of the process for setting up a service-learning opportunity with a particular agency. Such information might include contact name and method to contact (phone, e-mail); orientation procedures (including how much time they should allot and what information they should bring with them); dress code expectations; and information on accessibility (driving directions, parking information, bus line availability). It is also useful to maintain this material in information files about each community partner. Students can then access the files at their convenience and learn about the agencies before they start their service project.

While some might see this wealth of information as potentially intimidating, students selecting the service-learning option in an Introduction to Gerontology class overwhelmingly cited the in-class presentation as essential to their initial willingness to participate. In addition, those agency representatives who are enthusiastic about the project and who offer interesting and flexible service options and schedules were found to attract the most students (Karasik, 2002).

**Student Selection Process**

The selection process for student placement also deserves consideration. It is essential to have enough service-learning options available
so that every student who wants to participate has the opportunity to do so. Faculty need to collaborate with the community partners to determine the number of students each site can accommodate. Since a number of students may be interested in working at the same popular site, it may be necessary to develop a system for placing students. One approach is to have a limited number of slots for students to choose from on a first come-first choose basis. A lottery system is another approach. A third option is to have faculty use their knowledge of the students and the sites to select and assign students based on some criteria (e.g., a student’s academic grades or previous experience). While many faculty prefer to allow students to self-select their service options, these practices can help to ensure that all participating agencies are provided with a sufficient but not unwieldy number of students.

Additional Logistics

A good community partnership requires considerable work on both sides in order to plan and organize the service-learning experience. Setting up effective communication procedures with the faculty, students, and a community partner is essential from the start of the relationship (Karasik, 2005b). As discussed previously, setting specific procedures for initial contact and “signing up” with a particular service site can help students avoid frustration and the possibility of giving up before they get started. For example, if students will be contacting agencies directly, it is beneficial to find out which times of the day students will be most likely to reach agency representatives. In cases where several students are working with the same agency, designating one person to serve as liaison can streamline communication. Allowing time for student interaction with agency representatives following a classroom presentation can also facilitate the initial contact between students and agencies.

In addition to establishing communication procedures, another logistical consideration is determining whether a contract is needed between the community partner and the school. While many service-learning endeavors rely on verbal agreements rather than more formal, written ones, the benefits of a formal contract include spelling out the relationship and services that the student will provide and addressing issues such as confidentiality and liability. The drawbacks are that some partners may be reluctant to sign a formalized agreement and that it may take several weeks or months to obtain a ratified affiliation agreement. Since each institution is unique, contractual considerations should be discussed with the college or
university’s risk management or legal affairs department early on so that any issues can be worked out prior to the beginning of the course.

Like the contract, issues regarding liability also warrant consideration. Although many service-learning situations are low risk, it is best to discuss potential risks and liability with your institution’s legal affairs or risk management department. Some institutions provide liability insurance for each student, while others may require students to purchase their own. In some cases, community agencies may be able to provide such insurance as well.

Consideration should also be given to all potential scenarios that may involve even unintended liability. Even though there may have been a verbal agreement with an agency on what tasks or activities students will perform, some agency staff may ask the students to perform tasks that potentially involve the risk of liability. For example, in one case a student was asked to drive an older community mental health patient to a doctor. The student and the school were not comfortable having the student drive the patient, given the potential liability. The school now has clear policies in place regarding students transporting participants in their own vehicles. On the other hand, students at another school working with a local chore-assistance program provided assistance to older adults by transporting clients to the grocery store and other appointments in the community. Students in this program were covered by the host agency’s policies on volunteers. Thus, while there are few hard and fast rules for what a student should or should not do, partners must be carefully conscious of institutional policies and the legal liabilities they may incur.

Supervision

Both the school and the community partner should collaborate to determine the right amount and type of supervision for students as well as who should provide it. Service-learning experiences can require little or no supervision, or they may require a high degree of supervision. The supervision process varies based upon the population students are working with, community partner’s requirements, students’ skill levels, and the learning activities the students are performing. For example, students who received an in-depth orientation at a long term care facility required minimal supervision while visiting with cognitively intact elders during the facility’s social hour. Whereas, occupational therapy students leading group activities for patients with Alzheimer’s disease always had a staff member present in case a patient became agitated or confused. During this latter
experience, faculty also provided direct on-site supervision in order to further enhance the learning through guidance and feedback.

**Record Keeping**

Although not always considered the most meaningful or fulfilling part of the service-learning experience, faculty, students, and community partners may all need to participate in various record keeping and documentation tasks. Students may need to track their service hours, write notes, reflect on their experience, and fulfill evaluation requirements. Community partners may require documentation for day-to-day operations or for certifying, licensing, or accrediting organizations. Faculty may need to negotiate contracts, supervise documentation, and maintain student records and contracts. While some community agencies may require very little in the way of student data and preparatory training, other agencies may require students to provide information regarding health status or proof of insurance. Other agencies may require more extensive information such as criminal background checks, blood tests, drug screens, or first aid or cardiopulmonary resuscitation certification. Students and faculty need to maintain the appropriate records needed to fulfill the specified requirements. Students should always be informed of any special requirements well in advance, as it may involve additional time, fees, or personal background information to meet the requirement. Because regulations vary by state and institution, faculty should familiarize themselves with local policies regarding records and student information.

Moreover, any time students are exposed to personal information and personal records, confidentiality is a concern. While community agencies are likely to have privacy policies in place, it is essential that all involved (faculty, students, and community partners) are aware of the importance of maintaining appropriate measures of confidentiality. Attention should be given to how and where sensitive records are kept. Additionally, students should be instructed to use pseudonyms or other designators when preparing assignments that require them to refer specifically to an individual.

The privacy rule of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) has also added a new dimension to issues of confidentiality for those partnering with health care agencies. Several service-learning partnerships were challenged as agencies made sure they were in compliance with the 2003 federal privacy standards (United States Department of Health & Human Services, 2003). Partners may be confused or constrained by some of the community
agencies’ new rules. In the case of one senior housing complex, students in a computer training and friendly-visiting program were instructed by staff not to e-mail their senior tenant partners or to talk to them outside of the building. After much discussion and clarification, the agency revised its policy to exclude those cases where senior partners e-mailed or approached the student first. The Department of Health and Human Services’ Web site (www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa/) can provide useful guidance to partners who are trying to determine whether or not their planned service-learning activities will impinge on the new HIPAA regulations. As always, open discussion and flexibility among the partners can ease the logistical challenges of setting up a successful service-learning partnership.

**SUSTAINING THE COLLABORATION**

Once established, community-university partnerships require maintenance to keep them working well. As demonstrated throughout the discussion so far, good communication is essential to a healthy partnership as is ongoing assessment and recognition of the outcomes of the intergenerational collaboration.

**Communication**

It should come as no surprise that communication is a key component to maintaining a healthy community partnership. Good communication helps to build trust as well as to address small concerns before they become insurmountable problems. Often, partners opt for informal modes of communication (telephone, e-mail) to keep each other updated once the service experience is underway.

More formal types of communication (e.g., written letters and handouts), however, can be useful in facilitating the all important start of the quarter/semester service-learning student recruitment process. There is one approach that has worked well for the Gerontology Program service-learning experiences. That is to provide community partners with a brief document reminding them of the service-learning goals and objectives for the classes that are going to be involved prior to the start of the courses. As previously discussed, it is also helpful to provide community partners with current course syllabi and any service-learning descriptions and documents that students will be receiving about their service-learning assignments. Once this is done, verbally clarifying what you have agreed upon one more time before the students start the experience may avert any potential misunderstandings. Despite one’s best efforts, miscommunication can still
happen. If this occurs, it is important to work together collaboratively to find solutions to the current problem and to prevent the same concern from reoccurring in the future.

**Assessment**

Ongoing assessment is also vital to maintaining a viable service-learning collaboration. Assessment allows all involved parties to see the outcomes of the partnership. Typically, assessment has focused on the challenges of measuring the impact of service-learning on students (Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon, & Kerrigan, 1996; Gelmon, Holland, Driscoll, Spring, & Kerrigan, 2001). For example, while traditional evaluation modes such as tests are designed to measure factual knowledge, they are often inadequate for the purpose of getting at service-learning benefits such as interpersonal development, civic engagement, and enhanced critical thinking (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Alternative evaluative approaches are needed and might include supervisor or peer evaluation; development of a portfolio or presentation (Zlotkowski, 1998); pre and post service-learning assessments of student perceptions (e.g., of aging and older adults); written evaluations by students (e.g., of what they believe they learned from their service experience and/or if they plan to participate in community-based service again); and data on if, and for how long, students continue in their current service placement beyond course requirements (Karasik, 2005b).

Assessing the perceptions and satisfaction of the community partner is no less important (Karasik, 2005b). Partner satisfaction can be measured both through formal means (e.g., interviews, surveys, and focus groups) as well through more informal methods (e.g., attention to praise, frustration, and other partner interactions) (Gelmon et al., 2001). In one current example, service-learning community supervisors were asked to complete open-ended written feedback forms regarding their satisfaction with both student performance and the overall relevance of the service assignments to the community setting. Subsequent follow-up is essential to ensure that the concerns of all parties are not only heard but acted upon as appropriate.

Finally, one of the most challenging areas to assess is the impact service-learning has on the overall community. The ease with which one can measure such an impact depends upon how clearly the goals of service-learning have been defined and agreed upon. Some indicators (e.g., types of services provided, number of clients served, number of students involved, and the variety of activities offered) lend themselves fairly easily to measurement. Other factors (e.g., the
impact students have on a particular community concern) are harder to quantify. For example, it is far easier to measure how many older adults received friendly visits from students than it is to measure the impact of those visits on the participants’ overall health and well-being. It is also far easier to measure short term goals (e.g., the increase in older adults participating in a particular community activity) than to measure longer term outcomes (e.g., the impact of service-learning on the reduction of community elders being placed in nursing homes).

**Recognition**

In addition to measuring the outcomes of service-learning, it is also essential to celebrate successes both large and small. Recognition, however, is an often overlooked component of service-learning. Service-learning partnerships require a great deal of preparation, energy, and follow-through to be successful. Much of this effort is likely to come on top of partners’ already overloaded schedules. While the benefits of service-learning certainly provide rewarding outcomes to participants, recognition activities help to acknowledge the work required to obtain those benefits. Public recognition efforts can also help to solidify university-community relationships. It does this by institutionalizing less formal partnerships and providing evidence of work performed by the partners beyond their typical duties. Students, in particular, appear to be positively affected by recognition of their work. As one recent student participant noted, “I never really thought what I did would be very important to anyone.”

Recognition may take many forms including thank you letters, participation certificates, photo collages, Web site photos documenting the experience, special outings or activities, or celebratory banquets. In one of the gerontology program service-learning experiences, recognition was incorporated into the students’ reflection tasks by having students respond to the hypothetical scenario “If you had $100 to spend (as a class), what might you do to recognize the service-learning work that you and your service-learning partners have done?” Student responses included many of the ideas above, as well as suggestions such as taking senior community partners out to a meal, creating memory books of the partnership, and issuing press releases about their service-learning activities. Other ways that occupational therapy students have recognized the community partner include hosting a share-your-talent event, creating CDs of shared music to leave with the participants, collecting used
books for a library, donating equipment, and making minor repairs around the facility.

**SUMMARY**

Intergenerational service-learning is changing the way many institutions teach students about aging and the way many community agencies fill their volunteer needs. Successful relationships are mutually beneficial to students, faculty, service providers, older adults, and communities at large. The current discussion offers strategies for developing and maintaining healthy community-university collaborations. Good communication, collaboration, careful planning, close monitoring, and careful assessment were identified as essential ingredients.

Although there is much literature supporting the benefits of service-learning, there is a need for continued development of assessment tools and methods to effectively measure service-learning project outcomes for all constituents. Through examining the outcomes of service-learning projects, partners can focus on the best ways to collaborate and sustain the partnerships.

While the importance of each of these elements is not surprising, the potential for failure when they are lacking is substantial. Under such circumstances, relationships may become strained or forced to dissolve. Future relationships may also be jeopardized. Intergenerational service-learning partnerships, thus, should be formed with careful consideration of the potential outcomes and sustained with a strong, ongoing commitment from all its constituents.

**REFERENCES**


