From the Classroom to the Community – Designing a Service-Learning Course in Political Science

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Abstract

Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. This paper discusses the design and development process of a service-learning course in political science; provides models for implementation; and includes a review of the literature to support the implementation of service-learning as pedagogy for teaching and learning. Research indicates that service-based application of course content, coupled with a reflective component, not only functions to reinforce the content in a very concrete way, but also inculcates an appreciation for community partnerships and engagement. The intent of this paper is to assist interested faculty in developing their own courses utilizing service-learning as a tool to enhance creative and critical thinking. The paper will address all aspects of the development process, including content selection, text selection, locating and utilizing community resources, assessment measures for determining the effectiveness of the course(s), and reflecting on the challenges faced during the design and development process.
John F. Kennedy is remembered for his call to service of the youth of America in the 1960s with the establishment of the Peace Corps (authorizing legislation approved by Congress in 1961). It appears that this legacy will be carried forward by President-elect, Barak Obama if his campaign promises to “engage America” come to fruition considering the realities of his upcoming term in office. The Obama-Biden campaign touted their plans to increase service in the United States by focusing time and resources on requirements for service in middle and high schools and specifically to “require 100 hours of community service in college.”

One area where this call to service has seen some slow but steady progress is in the combination of community service with classroom learning outcomes in higher education – or service-learning.

Service-learning is sometimes difficult to define because there are so many facets involved in what is referred to as true service-learning. Various departments on campuses do some form of community service or volunteer work requirements with their students and feel that they are using service-learning. However, there are some clear distinctions between some of those other worthwhile activities and service-learning. According to Edward Zlotkowski in his article “Pedagogy and Engagement” one of the most used definitions for service-learning is that of Bringle and Hatcher (1996):

“We view service learning as 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 the course content, a broader

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1 Timeline from the Corporation for National and Community Service Learn and Serve American website at www.learnandserve.gov.
appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. Unlike extracurricular voluntary service, service learning is a course-based service experience that produces the best outcomes when meaningful service activities are related to course material through reflection activities such as directed writings, small group discussions, and class presentations. Unlike practica and internships, the experiential activity in a service learning course is not necessarily skill-based within the context of professional education”.

Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. The Learn and Serve America website simply defines service-learning as “...a method of teaching and learning that connects classroom lessons with meaningful service to the community.” Additionally, it is “A philosophy, pedagogy, and model for community development that is used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards.” (Billig & Weah, 2008). Others go on to describe service-learning not by simple definition but by what it can accomplish or what it does for students by stating that:

“When service-learning is used in a structured way that connects classroom content, literature, and skills to community needs, students will:

• Apply academic, social, and personal skills to improve the community.
• Make decisions that have real, not hypothetical, results.
• Grow as individuals, gain respect for peers, and increase civic participation.

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3 Cited in Zlotkowski (in Jones) on pages 63-64
• Experience success no matter what their ability level.
• Gain a deeper understanding of themselves, their community, and society.
• Develop as leaders who take initiative, solve problems, work as a team, and demonstrate their abilities while and through helping others. (Kaye, 2004)

Though all of these definitions and characteristics are correct the focus of this paper is on what is now being referred to more commonly as “curricular” (Jacoby, 1996) service-learning, meaning that the service performed in the class is tied directly to the student learning outcomes determined by the professor for that particular course. This distinction is necessary to delineate the type of service-learning being performed and to maintain the academic component. The existence of “co-curricular service-learning” (Jacoby, 1996) speaks to the various student led volunteer service activities commonly used by fraternities and sororities and other organizations where students may learn leadership skills or have other outcomes but they are not tied directly to a specific academic discipline for academic credit. Probably the most confusion around service-learning is what it is “not”. Service-learning is not simply volunteerism or community service but part of a continuum of engagement. Probably the most common diagram used to describe this continuum is offered by Andrew Furco in the Introduction to Service-Learning Toolkit published by Campus Compact. Furco takes the descriptions of various “programs that combine service and learning” defined by Sigmon in the late 1970s and a later typology that shows service-learning occurs when there is a balance between learning goals and service outcomes. The continuum or “pictorial suggests that different types of service programs can be distinguished by their primary intended purpose and focus” (Furco 2003) and that each “program type is defined by the
intended beneficiary of the service activity and its degree of emphasis on service and/or learning” (Furco 2003).

As you can see, the focus of services like volunteerism is solely on the recipient side with the potential for little to no connection to the academic content or specific benefit to the provider. The cliché question to ask is “What does picking up trash on the highway have to do with an Introduction to American Government course?” and the general answer is “nothing ... unless...” and that unless is that students picking up trash are monitoring the areas where the trash is picked up, what types of trash are thrown out at what times, and they can take that information to their local and state governments or another agency involved in environmental protection or tourism and devise a plan to lobby for funding for local trash collection services in that particular city or county. It is highly possible that picking up trash can be turned into service-learning depending upon the type of course in which that service is completed and the learning outcomes set forth by the professor in that section of the course.

**Why Use Service-Learning?**

Service-learning is considered a form of experiential education. I have long believed that we in the field of political science lack a great deal of creativity when
naming theories and practices and I will give that same honor to those credited with
the experiential education movement, such as John Dewey. Experiential education
is simply that – learning through experience. The recent increase in discussion and
promotion of service-learning “stems partly from its fit with current views of the
way people learn best and the changes needed to make higher education more
effective.” (Eyler & Giles, 1999). The concept that learning “occurs through a cycle
of action and reflection, not simply through being able to recount what has been
learned through reading and lecture” (Eyler & Giles, 1999) reinforces the belief that
service-learning in higher education is a valid tool for promoting real learning. Eyler
& Giles continue to argue that recent studies in cognitive science reiterate the
earlier findings in that “students rarely transferred knowledge and principles
learned in classroom instruction to new problems” thus negating any belief that we
as teachers were creating a student body capable of critical thinking.

Likely the best rationale for service-learning in political science comes from
the very history of political science through editors Richard Battistoni and William
Hudson (1997) where they speak of the very foundational principles of political
science as an academic discipline: “…political science has maintained as one of its
prime objectives the linkage between ‘real-world’ experience and theoretical
understanding. From the beginning, political scientists have argued that direct
experience could enhance both our specific knowledge of governmental institutions
and political behavior and our general understanding of what it means to be a
citizen in a pluralistic, democratic society.” Simply put, the very core of our
educational belief system speaks to the need for students to have direct contact
with government in order to understand the major concepts. Countless books,
articles, and presentations have been published regarding the concept of civic
education and how our country has lost “social capital” and “social trust” (Putnam 2000). Putnam argues that “people who trust their fellow citizens volunteer more often, contribute more to charity, participate more often in politics and community organizations, serve more readily on juries, give blood more frequently, comply more fully with their tax obligations, are more tolerant of minority views, and display many other forms of civic virtue” and are generally “all around good citizens” (p 137). Service-learning places students into the community of the university or college working on real problems in that community and assisting to build the trusting relationship discussed by Putnam. Though Putnam is speaking generally about trust in other people and not simply government, his point is reiterated by Jean Bethke Elshtain in “The Decline of Democratic Faith” published in the AAHE series on service-learning, Experiencing Citizenship (pp. 9-14) where she discusses how “Experts and ordinary citizens lament the growth of a culture of mistrust, cynicism, and scandal.” (p. 9) Elshtain argues that service-learning, when implemented appropriately into the curriculum, offers a “promise of renewal” in the democratic faith. She argues that there are three different ways where service-learning can work to “counteract the forces of democratic deterioration”. (p. 13)

First, “Service-learning is a pedagogy that addresses directly the formation of the democratic dispositions that citizens need”. Elshtain goes on to express that the very act of community service can bring students to understand the need “to work for shared ends, cultivate a readiness to compromise, and help form an understanding of the collective nature of civic goods.” Of most concern to those of us teaching, her assertion then becomes that when the elements of community service are “combined with academic learning in a political science class” there can be a more clear understanding of the theory behind the academics “in support of
democratic values, turning the classroom into a school for democratic citizenship.” (p. 13)

Secondly, students are “in direct contact with the kinds of civic associations and civic spaces...central to a vibrant democratic life.” This experience gives students the chance to work with organizations that they may not have worked with otherwise and can then “reflect on their significance in American democracy.” (p. 13)

Lastly, service-learning that involves projects “across ethnic, racial, or class lines, can help break down the competing monoculturalisms”. This type of service allows students from “diverse backgrounds and experiences to work on common projects or to reach common goals.” Simply put, Elshtain argues that “Service-learning offers one of the more effective vehicles for concretely and meaningfully engaging issues concerning diversity and democracy.” Service-learning is a powerful vehicle that assists political scientists, specifically, in meeting not only their course academic goals but the general principles of good practice for the discipline by creating “good citizens” who are capable of thinking critically and understanding various points of view.

Fundamental Components of Service-Learning

When thinking about service-learning, it is essential that the following components should be present: (Heffernan, 2001):
1) Engagement: Does the service component meet a public good? How do you know this? Has the community been consulted? How? How have campus-community boundaries been negotiated and how will they be crossed?

2) Reflection: Is there a mechanism that encourages students to link their service experience to course content and to reflect upon why the service is important?

3) Reciprocity: Is reciprocity evident in the service component? How? “Reciprocity suggests that every individual, organization, and entity involved in the service-learning functions as both a teacher and a learner. Participants are perceived as colleagues, not as servers and clients.” (Jacoby, 1996 p. 36)

4) Public Dissemination – Is service work presented to the public or made an opportunity for the community to enter into public dialogue? For example: Do oral histories that students collect return to the community in some public form? Is the data students collect on the saturation of toxins in the local river made public? How? To whose advantage?

**Project and Partner Selection:**

The first step to adding a service-learning component to a course is to determine what type of service-learning project that you would like to complete. The most “pure” step is to contact a community learning partner\(^4\) and discuss with them what their needs are and begin to work together to determine the scope of the project. However, in the realities of academic planning, it is just as likely that you can determine a community need within your given area by watching the news or simply being alert to what is happening around you. In this case, you may choose to develop a project first and then approach the partner for their input. According to Edward Zlotkowski, in a presentation at the 2008 Kentucky Engagement Conference, there are 3 basic types of service-learning projects that fall under the umbrella of public engagement (one of the general goals of professors of political science is to create engaged citizens). The graphic was:

\(^4\) I will refer to community partners as community “learning” partners in order to make our University Counsel feel more comfortable since there may or may not be a formal partnership agreement on file with the University.
A project can be any one or a combination of these three things depending upon the type of course being taught. The key is that good service-learning is mindful of the student learning outcomes during the planning stages. A personal contact or direct service project would entail students spending large amounts of time doing service that generally involves direct contact with clients (registering voters for the League of Women’s Voters, for example). The recommendations for best practice are 2 hours per week for every 10 weeks the course is taught for a 3 credit hour course. Our institution uses 3 hours per credit hour offered as a minimum guideline so a 3 hour course would be 9 hours minimum for service.

The second category discussed by Zlotkowski is that of “problem-solving” or “asset-creating” projects. In this area, students may or may not work directly with the agency or organization as they would in direct service but they would learn about the community learning partner and work to create solutions to a particular problem. One example of this could be a local organization who works on child legal advocacy and they need a website developed to get their message across to more people in the community or need assistance with drafting legislation to take to their members of Congress. In this way, students are meeting an actual need and it does not have to include the “picking up trash” type of example used earlier.

The final type of projects discussed by Zlotkowski open the area of service-learning up to those in higher education who are more research focused and assist students in becoming better researchers themselves. Many organizations or
community learning partners are in need of outside assistance in doing things like needs assessments, best practices information, etc. One of my favorite examples of a research based project happened recently at our university with Dr. Richard Osbaldiston and his graduate psychology research students. Their project evolved from a conversation with the local Salvation Army Captain who was in charge of the bell-ringers for the holidays. The premise was simple: do bell-ringers wearing festive clothing have a greater impact on the amount of money given during a certain period of time and location? Now, this may not be a political science example but is a very basic example of how those students can then take research methods that they are learning in class and apply them to their “service” of bell-ringing once that has been completed. I am still awaiting the results of this particular research.

How I Chose My Community Learning Partner:

Before taking my current position as the Service-Learning Coordinator for my university, my primary teaching load has been introductory level American government or Principles of Politics and Government courses that are either general education or major requirements for majors OUTSIDE of political science. The one common thread between these courses (whether I have taught them at an extended campus, on the main campus, or through the Internet) is that the majority of my students ask WHY they have to take these courses if they are not majoring in government? I have routinely heard things like “I hate politics and this course is pointless to me!” The primary majors enrolling my courses are criminal justice, nursing, and education majors. I have often been confounded as to why they do not believe that learning about government is relevant to their fields since all three of
those particular fields are wrought with governmental connections! When
determining whether or not to add a service-learning component to my course(s) I
took this repetitive feedback to heart and realized that whatever I did must bring
home to those students the “why” in their question about studying government. I
began thinking of all of the ways that government, both locally and nationally,
played a role in their particular disciplines and started making lists of possible
“community learning partners” that would hold a common thread between these
three predominant majors. I considered tutoring projects in the local middle and
high schools; having students create web-pages for young children on the different
facets of government; having students work with the newly developed night court
and a local district judge to assist clients with paperwork, procedures, etc. then
develop some type of lobbying effort to increase the number of counties offering
such a service; then I realized that there was one area within the community that I
had a great deal of expertise and passion for and that touched every single one of
the majors being discussed in very real and dramatic ways – domestic violence.
Our county now has a “shelter” for victims of abuse that took over a decade to put
into place and they offer a variety of services to their clients that range from crisis
counseling, medical attention, basic housing, job assistance, training, childcare, and
legal advocacy within the family court system in the county. This particular
organization acts as a link to many other local services that can be utilized by
victims of domestic violence.

Since my course will be taught in the spring of 2010, I am in the beginning
stages of course development. I have a general idea of what I want to accomplish
and need to make that fit into my student learning outcomes. My first step here is
to contact my potential community learning partner and meet with the Director to
discuss possible ways that my students could work within her organization and what types of needs there are. I will keep her in the planning “loop” throughout the process as her support is critical to making this process a success. At this first meeting, I will not have any contracts or memorandums of understanding but will get to know the organization more intimately while keeping in mind the goals of my class.

**General Guidelines for Choosing/Maintaining Good Partnerships:**

Some of the following guidelines were borrowed and interpreted liberally from the Humboldt State University “Faculty Guide to Service Learning” but are considered general knowledge and basic common sense when working with organizations outside of your college or university.

1) Plan ahead – do not wait until the last minute to choose a partner. If your university has a service-learning or volunteer coordinator, contact them for possible leads if you have none.

2) Visit the organization(s) you are considering and speak with them about your course outcomes and learn more about their organization and what their actual needs are (you may find they are slightly different than what you had in mind when you first chose them). Determine the number of service-learning students that the partner can reasonably accommodate (a staff of 3-4 people may not be able to work with 40 undergraduate students) and adjust your number of potential partners or the service-project needs accordingly.

3) Explain the concept of service-learning to the partner and provide information about your course goals and what you hope the students will learn from the experience. Make a clear distinction between traditional volunteers and what you want your students to accomplish during their service. It could take some digging within the agency to determine if there are areas where your students could be useful outside of the traditional volunteer activities.

4) Work with your community learning partner to develop shared responsibility for the program (orientation, training, project development, supervision, reflection, evaluation, and recognition) and clarify roles and responsibilities of all involved parties – logistics. It is essential to design a plan for evaluation of

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5 http://studentaffairs.humboldt.edu/slee/handbooks_forms.php
the service-learning experience and how you will communicate with the community learning partner throughout the service-learning experience.

5) Do not allow students to randomly choose their own placements. If this is necessary, make sure to provide clear criteria for any agency with whom your students will work to ensure adherence to the course objectives and purpose of the service activity.

6) Provide on-campus and on-site orientations for your students to the community learning partner to familiarize students with policies, procedures, and risks involved in the specific activity they will be providing. Additionally, students should be aware of any special concerns with the populations that they will serve. If students must complete a background check this should be done during the FIRST class meeting or before, if possible.

7) Check with your college/university policy specialists about student liability coverage while participating in service-learning and complete any necessary forms PRIOR to the students engaging in service activities.

**Project Planning/Course Construction:**

The first area to consider when choosing a project with your identified community learning partner is that of the student learning outcomes (or goals/objectives) for the course you will be teaching. At our university, the course(s) that I teach are both general education requirements, therefore, there are specific learning outcomes that are required for each course. Our outcomes are broken down into college level (Social and Behavioral Sciences) and departmental/class level with the professor maintaining the ability to add to any of the minimum outcomes. In my course planning, this situation actually helped narrow my scope for my project somewhat because it gave me a starting point. The outcomes are general and broad for the college but I immediately identified at least two of the four that are relevant to the type of experience that I desire for my students. I am focusing on the second and fourth outcomes with regard to the Principles of Politics and Government and Introduction to American Government course(s) that I teach.
Students will be able to:

- Use appropriate methods of critical thinking and quantitative reasoning to examine issues and to identify solutions.

- **Analyze the social and behavioral influences that explain how people relate to each other, to institutions, and to communities.**

- Distinguish the methods that underlie the search for knowledge in the arts, humanities, natural sciences, history, and social and behavioral sciences.

- **Integrate knowledge that will deepen their understanding of, and will inform their own choices about, issues of personal and public concern.**

There are two overlying departmental and course specific outcomes that relate directly to my course(s):

- Civic engagement: Students will gain political literacy: including enhanced appreciation of the importance of political participation and public service; and through increased opportunities for civic engagement.

- Diversity in Politics: Students will become more aware of the political impact that social cleavages and cultural contexts can produce in American democracy as well as in other political systems.

Since my particular course is going to use the Hope’s Wings Domestic Violence Shelter as a community learning partner, the outcomes listed above can be met through a variety of projects. Of course, I will work more closely with the Director of the Shelter for additional ideas but have developed a couple of possible projects that require direct service, problem-solving/asset-creation, and/or research activities. The primary issue that I see when dealing with an organization such as Hope’s Wings is that students come into class with very specific biases about domestic violence. I would expect students to use this particular “theme” and their service-learning time and be able to carry over the knowledge they are gaining about a particular topic (i.e. domestic violence) into the broad concepts that we will study in the course(s) including but not limited to:
1. Public Opinion and Media: Can students identify areas where policy or opinion is shaped about domestic violence through media and even people that they know?

2. Interest Groups: Are there particular groups associated with the issue of domestic violence? How do they get their agenda in a place where it can be effective? What ways can they, as students, work in this area to bring awareness or “change”??

3. Bureaucracy: What types of “hurdles” does someone have to go through when seeking assistance to leave or remain safe when exiting abuse? Are there procedures in place locally that assist or hinder ending violent relationships? Do police officers, nurses, teachers, etc. get appropriate training on domestic violence and how/where people can seek assistance?

4. Judiciary: What types of laws, if any, are on the books for protection of victims or punishment of perpetrators of domestic violence? Are there differences in the laws associated with victims or perpetrators from various socio-economic status levels?

5. Human Rights: How does domestic violence play a role in human affairs across the globe? What types of organizations work for the betterment of women, men, and children involved in intimate partner violence?

My primary goals for this service-project include students being able to recognize or identify any biases or misinformation that they may possess in this particular topic area (then transfer that to other areas of social concern); recognize that there are governmental themes present in their lives outside of political advertisements and their preconceived notions of politics and government as something “outside” of themselves; and that regardless of their chosen
profession(s), they could encounter the issue of domestic violence or something similar and be called to action.

Due to the broad outcomes that I have chosen for this particular course and service-learning project, I believe that any American government or introductory political science textbook (or supplemental readings that would normally be used in my class) could suffice for this project. However, I am in process of reviewing more “issue” related textbooks for future classes as well as additional materials or articles for reserve readings. I believe that through appropriate class discussion and general course design (scheduled reflections, class discussions, and examples used in lecture or assignments) that the service-learning experience can be easily absorbed into the course content using the types of questions mentioned earlier that require students to use the service activity as a jumping off point for their thought process.

Having now determined the general outcomes, it is essential that all relevant information be laid out in the syllabus for the course. The syllabus acts as the student’s first introduction to the value placed upon the service-learning activity in a course, therefore, having prominence and clarity in the explanation is paramount. Exemplary service-learning syllabi will include the following:6

Service-learning as an expressed goal or outcome

Contact and site information for the community partner(s)

Description of how the service-learning experience will be measured and assessed

Description of the nature of the service-learning project

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6 Adapted from Heffernan, K. (2001). Fundamentals of Service-Learning Course Construction. Campus Compact
Specifics on how the students will be expected to demonstrate what they have learned

Course assignments that link the service placement and the course content (i.e. reflection)

**Reflecting Upon Reflection:**

The concept of “reflection” is so critical to the service-learning class that it requires its own section in the planning process. Commonly referred to as the “hypen” in service-learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999) the purpose of reflection is to actually tie the service to the learning. As stated earlier, students will be using their experience(s) in my class to make “real” the content we will be studying. Some examples of reflection (or analysis and synthesizing information, if you prefer) activities commonly used in service-learning include group discussion, journals (of various forms), directed writings (asking students to consider the service experience within the framework of course content), experiential research papers with class presentations (individual or group), online discussion, ethical case studies, service-learning portfolios, personal narratives, exit cards, class presentations, and weekly logs or blogs. It is my intention to primarily use:

1. The double-entry journal where students write their personal thoughts or experiences from the service-experience on the left page of the journal and then write about key issues from class discussions or readings on the right side. Students can then connect the experiences and content using arrows from one page to the other.

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7 A detailed description of each of these categories can be found at the Center for Service & Learning at IUPUI [http://csl.iupui.edu/OSL/2c1.asp](http://csl.iupui.edu/OSL/2c1.asp) along with other tip sheets for faculty in the planning and implementation of service-learning into their courses. Original material is credit to *Service learning tip sheets: A faculty resource guide*, Hatcher, J.A., Ed. (1998). Indiana Campus Compact: Indianapolis, IN.
2. Online and in class discussions with the first reflection exercise being a discussion of “myths” and “truths” about domestic violence or stereotypes and personal feelings they may have regarding the issue(s) in conjunction with an orientation from the community learning partner to assist in answering any technical questions.

3. Experiential research paper(s) where students will identify an underlying social issue they have encountered at the service site. The students will then research that issue and then make recommendations to the agency for future action. At this time, I am considering turning this particular assignment into a legislative exercise where students present their findings to their legislators but am still in the early planning stages of this type of concept.

The Bureaucracy of Service-Learning in Higher Education/Risk Management

Any good class involving politics or government would not be complete without the appearance of bureaucratic checkpoints. As I eluded to early in the paper, there are issues associated with any experiential education where a student goes somewhere besides the safe (presumably) confines of the sacred classroom and ventures out into the world full of Interstate snipers, road-rage, sexual harassment, and so forth in the name of education. Therefore, it is essential that one of the first steps after you have selected the type of project you wish to complete is to consult with your Service-Learning Coordinator about any special forms that your college or university may use for students to sign regarding the college/university liability policies. If you are unable to locate any specific person, I suggest starting with your College of Education or wherever teachers are trained
who have to go into the field for student teaching. The most common issue that will arise is one of injury to the student during their service and who could be held liable (the college/university or the agency with whom the student is partnering). It is important that you discuss potential risks and liability issues with your community learning partner DURING the project planning stage(s) to avoid any miscommunications once the project begins.

The other areas where forms will come into play involve any criminal background checks, medical requirements such as TB skin or drug tests are concerned. These types of requirements will generally be on behalf of the community learning partner but the logistics of how long it takes for a student background check to come back and how to deal with out of state student background checks could affect the starting point of your service-learning project. Additionally, if students are required to pay for these items that should be communicated clearly in the syllabus prior to the drop/add date of the course.

Several items that you may consider can be created by you for your particular class and those could include:

- Student Learning Plan or Contract – include guidelines for appropriate behavior at the site, specific requirements for the service activity, any associated risks involved in participation, and signature of the participating student.

- Community Learning Partner/Faculty Memorandum of Understanding - outlining the desired outcomes of the project and the responsibilities of each partner. This should include all contact information for the community learning partner and faculty member(s) as well.

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8 I recommend reviewing the Humboldt State University “Faculty Guide to Service Learning” or The Complete Guide to Service Learning: Proven, Practical Ways to Engage Students in Civic Responsibility, Academic Curriculum, and Social Action, Kaye, C.B., 2004. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, Inc. for examples of forms commonly used in service-learning courses. Scores of other forms/resources of this nature can be found in a simple web search for “faculty handbooks” and “service-learning” and several will be listed in the “Helpful Resources” section at the end of this paper.
• Human Subject Review – note your college/university guidelines for appropriate Board Review criteria if you plan to use information obtained during your project for future research and/or publication.

• Emergency Contact Information Forms – when students are going off campus, it is wise to keep handy records for emergency contact information that can be accessed by both the faculty member and community learning partner(s).
• Service-Learning/Training Log – this will help students document their hours during their service-project. It is important that students be respectful of the agency requirements and if the agency already has procedures for monitoring attendance, those records could be used for verification in lieu of a separate document.

• Orientation Checklist – this can be a detailed list of all of the items that you and/or the community learning partner feel the students should have access to prior to beginning their service. The orientation is critical, especially in areas where students may be encountering a great deal of diversity so that they can go in with as much preparation as possible.

**Should I Require Service-Learning?**

The service-learning course(s) that I am developing will require the service activity as part of the course. I am comfortable with this decision because there are multiple other sections of the course in which students can enroll if they do not wish to participate in the service-activity. However, the situation could arise where a student does not, for some reason, pass the background check for the community learning partner after the deadline to drop/add another class has passed (I will be cautious to not allow this to happen) so that student will have to be allowed to continue in the class. In this event, I am going to be designing a “research paper” topic much like the social issue paper mentioned earlier in the reflection section where the student can still participate in a similar experience without the service component. In the event that the course being offered is the only section of a particular course, it is possible that, for whatever reason, a student simply cannot participate in the service-learning activity and accommodations for that student
should be considered prior to course development so that valuable educational time is not lost.

**Final Thoughts**

Undertaking the process of developing a service-learning course can seem daunting. There are a few simple lessons that I have learned during the early stages of the process. First, start early! The actual workload during the “teaching” part of the course will likely not change if the leg work is done up front and there are contingency plans in place for issues like those mentioned above. Second, consider limiting the number of students you allow to enroll in the course (assuming you have this authority) during the first attempt at service-learning so that the choice of community learning partners is not limited by the sheer number of students and the faculty burden of keeping up with the logistics of managing students “off-site” is not overwhelming. Third, choose a placement or project that means something to you, as the faculty member, to get your “feet wet” because your interest level in maintaining the project will likely be enhanced and any pitfalls you may encounter along the way may have less of an impact on your project if you are personally invested (Caution: controversial issues should be approached with care- having anti-abortion students serve in an abortion clinic could lead to chaos, for example). Fourth, explore the possibility of course release time for new course design and preparation and scour your university for faculty development funds to assist with any travel or course related expenses that you may incur with planning. This type of funding is more commonly available for both faculty and students especially if it involves faculty scholarship regarding service-learning. Finally, consider adding a small, one day, project to see how students react and determine if something larger in nature will benefit your course if you are not quite sure that
semester long service-learning is the right fit for your particular course(s) and/or make sure to include assessment of the service-learning project from all affected parties (student/community learning partner/faculty member)⁹ and make necessary adjustments in subsequent semesters from the lessons learned.

Copies of assessment instruments for the appendix could not be uploaded with this paper. Interested parties may email me for copies at Deanna.kasitz@eku.edu.

⁹ See sample service-learning course assessment tools attached to this paper for courses being offered through the Quality Enhancement Program Service-Learning Project at Eastern Kentucky University. Additional assessment items can be found in Assessing Service-Learning and Civic Engagement: Principles and Techniques, Gelmon, S. et al. 2001. Campus Compact. Providence, R.I.
Bibliography


*IUPUI Center for Service Learning*. IUPUI. 14 December 2008 < http://sls.iupui.edu/osl/2c1.asp >


Helpful Resources:


http://www.semesterofservice.org/ : Contains various links on service-learning projects and curriculum maps, etc. that can be useful when looking for ideas for planning. Most of the material is geared toward K-12 schools but the call to service is for children from 5-25 which includes higher education.
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