Eight Essential Elements of Service Learning

Service Learning can be incorporated into all disciplines. The following eight key elements of Service Learning address what students should know and be able to do as a result of their participation in a Service Learning course. All eight of the following elements should be present in every Service Learning course and should work in concert to create powerful teaching and learning experiences. The Service Learning experience should include the following:

1. **Meet a real community need, integrating "community voice":** Service Learning courses are developed in an ongoing process that allows individuals or communities with needs to define those needs.

2. **Link to curriculum**: Service Learning is intentionally used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards. Indicators:

   - Service Learning has clearly articulated Student Learning Outcomes.
   - Service Learning is aligned with the academic and/or programmatic curriculum with opportunities to reflect on the connections between the service experience and the curriculum.
   - Service Learning helps students learn how to transfer knowledge and skills from one setting to another.

3. **Preparation:** Extensive orientation for effective and sensitive community participation includes:
   a. On-site orientation and training with the community organization, the specific projects or activities the Service Learner will be involved with, and to the community surrounding the site;
   b. Classroom-based preparation introducing students to the concepts of Service Learning, reflection, and reciprocity; the responsibilities and privileges associated with community involvement; and exploration of the Service Learners' assumptions and expectations of the Service Learning process, of people they will be working with, and of the local community.

4. **"Reciprocity" – Meaningful Service:** Partnerships must be worthwhile and valuable for all participants -- students, community, and faculty. Service Learners are generally most effective when the activities they engage in are meaningful to the site and consistent with the course student learning outcomes. It is also important that Service Learners understand the larger context of their work and why it is valuable to the organization. The majority of a student's experiences may provide them with an opportunity to interact directly with community members, as well as behind-the-scenes work which can be a valuable part of their learning if they understand its relevance and importance.

5. **Systematic reflection**: Service Learning is deeply rooted in the action-reflection theories of John Dewey and David Kolb, who both describe the importance of combining individual action and engagement with reflective thinking to develop greater understanding of the content being studied (Crews 1999). Kolb is widely cited for providing a scientific interpretation of reflection (Olson 2000). Kolb illustrates the process of reflection in the Experiential Learning Cycle (Figure 1). See next page.

The process begins with a defining and sharing of the "What?" of the student's experience and follows a continuous cycle towards "So What?" and "Now What?". Answers to the "what, so what and now what" questions are tied together to form a comprehensive and integrated discovery and learning cycle for the student throughout the duration of a Service Learning experience (Eyler 1999). Effective strategies for fostering reflection are based on five core elements of reflection known as "the Five C's" - "Creative, Continuous, Connected, Challenging, Contextualized" (Eyler and Giles 1999). *Source: Kara Connors and Sarena D. Seifer, Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, September 2005.*
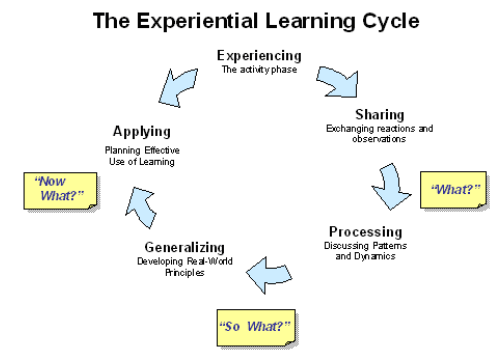
The Experiential Learning Cycle

Figure 1

6. **Development at all stages**: Service Learning occurs in different stages. For example, the learning experience often begins with pre-field preparation and moves to engagement in partnership with the community. Students move from defining to problem-solving community needs – from observation to experience to leadership. Faculty make course adjustments to meet emerging needs. Community partners define the need and communicate developments and accomplishments. It is important to remain aware of potential challenges participants may face at various stages in the process, while making adjustments to meet the emerging needs of all participants.

7. **Foster civic responsibility and diversity**: When students have a role in improving society, working for social justice, and caring for the environment, with exposure to a wide diversity of cultures and experiences, then they truly understand the concept of democracy. Students recognize how participation and the ability to respond to authentic needs improve the quality of life in the community, which may lead to a lifelong ethic of service and civic engagement. This element directly aligns with the Humboldt State University Vision, to: "…*be the campus of choice for individuals who seek above all else to improve the human and environmental condition…. We will be renowned for social and environmental responsibility and action. We believe that it is the individual citizen, acting in good conscience and engaging in informed ethical action, who will preserve and advance our world. We will commit to increasing our diversity of people and perspectives*."

8. **Ongoing, embedded evaluation:** All partners need to know what they will be evaluated on and what they will be evaluating others on at the beginning of the Service Learning process. Therefore, evaluation should be linked to preparation and development of the Service Learning experience and course, and should be ongoing, not just something that takes place at the end of the experience. Ongoing supervision and opportunities for checking in with one another is also essential.

For information on the benefits and effects of Service Learning on student success rates, including personal, social, and learning outcomes, along with career and civic development impacts and much more, please refer to At A Glance: What We Know about the Effects of Service-Learning on College Students, Faculty, Institutions and Communities, 1993-2000: Third Edition **(**Eyler, Giles, Stenson, and Gray, Vanderbilt University, August 31, 2001). http://www.compact.org/resources/downloads/aag.pdf

Information on the 10 Wingspread principles crucial to an effective Service Learning program can be found in Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning: A Wingspread Special Report, by Ellen Porter Honnet and Susan J. Poulsen; published by the Johnson Foundation, Inc. https://www.nationalserviceresources.gov/online-library/items/r4174#.U3PSJCgvCaQ