

The ToolBox



VOLUME V ISSUE 6

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER, 2007

A Teaching and Learning Resource for the Faculty of Indiana Wesleyan University

Serving to Learn: Learning to Serve

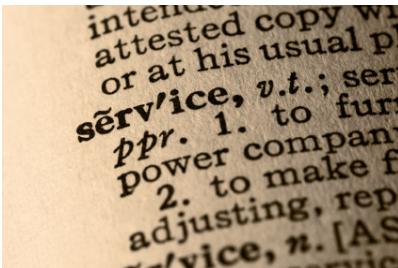
Serving as Learning

The term “service-learning” has become a common part of conversations in higher education. As such, it is a term that has taken on a variety of meanings. Rhoads and Howard (1998) call service-learning “a pedagogy of action and reflection.” Weigert (1998) identified six common themes that should be considered as criteria for a true service-learning experience:

1. Students provide a meaningful service.
2. The service that students provide meets an identified need or goal.
3. Members of the community are actively involved in defining the need.
4. The services provided have a direct connection to the learning outcomes of the course.
5. There is an element of reflection by the student.
6. There is an explicit understanding that students are being evaluated on their reflections and learning—not on the fact that they have provided a service.

These criteria for service-learning send several strong messages:

- **The identified service meets a need beyond simply providing an assignment for students to complete.** The need is one that is felt and defined by the recipients of the “service” (e.g., the community).
- **Learning is an expectation of the process.** Learning that can include skill acquisition, application of knowledge and skills acquired in the classroom, and the development of dispositions related to serving others.
- **It is critical that students reflect on what they are learning.** One of the factors that separates service-learning from community service is the intentional emphasis on reflection. In a service-learning paradigm, students take stock of their service experience from a variety of perspectives



Rhoads, R. A., & Howard, J. P. F. (Spring, 1998). Academic service learning: A pedagogy of action and reflection. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 73, 39-46.

Weigert, K. (Spring, 1998). Academic service learning: Its meaning and relevance. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 73, 3-11.

Serving as a Lifestyle Choice

Time is always a key variable in our lives. For students, there is a common belief that the college experience is simply an interlude between high school and a career. Thoughts about allotting time to serve others is often viewed as a good idea, but one that will have to wait until they are out of school “when they have more time.” Realistically, they will probably have more “free” time during their college years than at any other time in their lives. The college years are prime time for students to begin making commitments to service as a lifestyle choice.

Part of this discussion must also be related to faculty members and their role in modeling service as a critically important part of life. Faculty may also resort to playing the “I don’t have enough time” card when asked to engage in service to the community or the world-at-large. There is no doubt that faculty members have many campus commitments and full schedules. Equally compelling, however, is the power that comes from the image and the example of a faculty member who chooses to actively serve alongside their students. This picture sends a powerful message and enhances the credibility of the need for *all of us* to assume the role of servants with the goal of helping to make the world a better place.

Mother Teresa was once asked how she had managed to accomplish such great things in her life. She responded, “None of us can do anything great on our own, but we can all do a small thing with great love.” Faculty who serve are models of this philosophy. This lesson is a far greater medium than any words they may ever speak in the classroom.

Making service a lifestyle choice is based upon several key suppositions:

- **Service is always a choice.** We can choose to serve or we can choose to look the other way. The choice is always there.
- **Service is generally inconvenient.** By definition, service is providing help or assistance to another person. Those needs do not always appear in accordance with a schedule, preferred time, or preferred way of spending time.
- **Service is a way of spreading light and love.** By making the choice to extend ourselves, even at the most inconvenient times, doing the things we find most abhorrent, we are shining the light of love and compassion into a world that needs that influence. Don’t we want that for our students?

Three Approaches to Reflection

Taking the time to reflect on the events in our lives is an activity that we often view as a luxury rather than a requirement. Our busy, fast-paced world has conditioned us to keep moving without taking time to reflect on where we have been, where we are going, and what we are learning along the way. A key component of service-learning is the process of reflection. Consider the following approaches to reflection as your students undertake service-learning activities:

- **The Mirror: Reflecting on ourselves.** In this type of reflection we do an inventory of our own gifts, talents, strengths, and challenges. In relation to service-learning, students may ask themselves questions such as: How well suited was I to this activity? What would I need to improve my performance? Did I fully invest in this activity? Could I have given more of myself? How will this learning impact my future choices in regard to serving others? How have I grown spiritually from this experience? How does this experience influence my beliefs about my life calling/purpose?
- **The Microscope: Reflecting on ways that the small connects with the large.** In this part of the reflective process, students reflect on questions such as: How does this organization/agency/service fit into the larger scheme of things? Does this experience support and strengthen my ideas about the things I have been learning in this course? What have I learned about this community or this particular area of community need? Did I have an impact?
- **The Binoculars: Bringing the large and distant closer.** Questions might include: What does the future hold? How is this agency or service provider impacted by the political and fiscal climate? Who monitors the quality of services provided to this group of individuals. What can I do to support efforts in this area?

One way of encouraging students to share their thoughts and respond to the thoughts of others is through the creation of a blog. Students, for example, could be required to provide a certain number of reflective entries and a certain number of responses to the entries of other students over the course of a semester or service learning experience.

Adapted from "Reflection: Getting Learning Out of Serving, The Big Dummy's Guide to Service Learning" by Mark Cooper at: <http://www.fiu.edu/~time4chg/Library/bigdummy.html>

Getting Started

Do you have an interest in beginning to develop a service-learning component into your classes and find yourself wondering how to get started? Some things to consider:

1. **Analyze course-related learning outcomes** to determine possible connection points for the implementation of a service-learning requirement.
2. **Make connections** with people and agencies in the community who might have a need that corresponds to the content and focus of your course. This is the point at which your ability as a faculty member to effectively network with people on your campus and in your community becomes an important asset on behalf of your students.
3. **Delineate your expectations for student participation** in the service-learning process (e.g., time commitments, behavioral expectations, documentation, formats for reflection, due dates).
4. **Maintain ongoing communication with service-learning sites** to monitor the quality of services that are being provided by students and to troubleshoot any difficulties that may arise. When serving in the community, our work and service ethic, and that of our students, sends a powerful message.
5. **Serve alongside your students** as a means of relating more closely to their reflections and observations about the experience.
6. **Continually evaluate the process and the outcomes** to determine better and more effective ways of integrating this experience into the pedagogy of your classes.



The ToolBox

Editor: **Brad Garner**
 Telephone: **765.677.2452**
 E-mail: **brad.garner@indwes.edu**

Published by
Indiana Wesleyan University
 as a resource for faculty.

Indiana Wesleyan University
 4301 South Washington Street
 Marion, IN 46953