Teaching a Service Learning Course

“Service learning enables students to achieve ethical learning through an integration of information, research, analysis and interpretation with community-based experience. This integration transforms them from observers to participants who engage issues and questions embedded in our society on intellectual and experiential levels.”

– Lucy Jarosz, UW Associate Professor of Geography and Chair, Program on Africa

WHAT IS SERVICE LEARNING?

Service learning is a pedagogical method by which faculty can engage community resources in support of their course goals. University of Washington students can participate in thoughtfully organized service experiences that

- integrate into and enhance the academic course of study,
- take place in and meet the needs of the community,
- include structured time for students to reflect on the service experience, and
- foster civic responsibility.

Examples of Service Learning Courses, 1999/2000:

Introduction to Database Systems, Women in Law and Literature, Spanish Composition, Pharmaceutical Care Systems, Fisheries Management and Conservation, State and Industry, Economic Geography

DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE SERVICE LEARNING COURSES

Four crucial components provide the foundation for developing effective service learning courses. Veteran service learning practitioners return to these components each time they teach a service learning course.

1. Planning the Course

   - Identify course content goals: By the end of the course, what questions do you want students to be able to answer?
   - How might a community-based learning experience enhance understanding of issues in class?

2. Coordinating with the Community

   - After learning about your goals and course design, the staff of the Carlson Leadership and Public Service Center will contact community organizations on your behalf. They will also coordinate student sign-up and can arrange for community organizers to speak to your class.

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3. Integrating Students’ Experiential Learning
   • When writing your syllabus, consider how to draw upon the service experiences of students and help students effectively integrate them into the course.
   • Designing opportunities for students to reflect on their community-based experience is a key component of learning. Double-entry journals, daily logs, response papers, simulations, small group discussions and focused conversation are all useful tools for reflection.

4. Monitoring, Assessment, and Evaluation
   • When planning assessment procedures for the course, you can design quizzes, exams, papers, and projects in ways that ask students to draw on and demonstrate what they are learning through their service experience. This, in turn, will allow you to evaluate student progress.
   • You can also ask community site supervisors and the students themselves about their learning. Each quarter the Carlson Center distributes a service learning questionnaire to all service learning classes. Here is one student’s assessment of a service learning experience:

   “My service learning experience has been valuable to my understanding of the concepts and issues raised in this course .... [It] has provided a space where I can negotiate our class readings and discussions through a “real-life” perspective showing me the importance of these issues in world, community, and personal politics.” (student in Women and Politics, Fall 1999)

SERVICE LEARNING RESOURCES

The Carlson Leadership and Public Service Center offers a wealth of service learning resources for UW instructors:
http://depts.washington.edu/leader/

You can also visit the University of Washington Political Science Department with questions on service learning:
http://www.polisci.washington.edu/

Visit CIDR for assistance with course design, assessment, and integrating service learning into your course:
http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/

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