

Definitions of Service-Learning

Service-learning means a method under which students learn and develop through thoughtfully organized service that: is conducted in and meets the needs of a community and is coordinated with an institution of higher education, and with the community; helps foster civic responsibility; is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students enrolled; and includes structured time for students to reflect on the service experience.

American Association for Higher Education (AAHE): Series on Service-Learning in the Disciplines (adapted from the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993).

Service-learning means a method under which students or participants learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that: is conducted in and meets the needs of a community and is coordinated with an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, [and] or community service program, and with the community; helps foster civic responsibility; is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students or the educational components of the community service program in which the participants are enrolled; and includes structured time for the students and participants to reflect on the service experience.

National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993

Service-learning is a method through which citizenship, academic subjects, skills, and values are taught. It involves active learning—drawing lessons from the experience of performing service work. Though service-learning is most often discussed in the context of elementary and secondary or higher education, it is a useful strategy as well for programs not based in schools.

There are three basic components to effective service-learning:

- The first is sufficient preparation, which includes setting objectives for skills to be learned or issues to consider, and includes planning projects so they contribute to learning at the same time work gets done.
- The second component is simply performing service.
- Third, the participant attempts to analyze the experience and draw lessons, through such means as discussion with others and reflection on the work. Thinking about the service creates a greater understanding of the experience and the way service addresses the needs of the community. It promotes a concern about community issues and a commitment to being involved that mark an active citizen. At the same time the analysis and thought allow the participants to identify and absorb what they have learned.

Learning and practicing citizenship are lifelong activities which extend far beyond the conclusion of formal education. Service-learning can be used to increase the citizenship skills of participants of any age or background. For this reason service-learning can be a tool to achieve the desired results of programs, even those involving older, highly educated participants. For example, service-learning can be part of the training of participants to prepare them to do high quality service that has real community impact.

Some service-learning occurs just from doing the work: after a month working alongside police, a participant has surely learned some important lessons about how to increase public safety, and something about what it means to be a good citizen. However, programs that encourage active learning from service experience may have an even greater impact.

Developed by the Corporation on National and Community Service as part of their briefing materials for national community service.

Service is a process of integrating intention with action in a context of movement toward a just relationship.

Community Service is the application of one's gifts, skills, and resources to provide something of value, to enhance

the quality of life of people who articulate a need or desire for service.

Community Service is a space to practice here and now small scale models of a shared utopian vision.

Service-learning is a form or subset of experiential education and community service.

In service-learning, service is the experiential component of experiential education.

Service-learning is an intentionally designed (course, program, activity, etc.),

and is a process of learning through reflection on the experience of doing service.

Nadine Cruz, Associate Director - Haas Center for Public Service

Service-learning appears to be an approach to experiential learning, an expression of values—service to others, which determines the purpose, nature and process of social and educational exchange between learners (students) and the people they serve, and between experiential education programs and the community organizations with which they work.

Timothy Stanton

Service-learning is the various pedagogies that link community service and academic study so that each strengthens the other. The basic theory of service-learning is Dewey's: the interaction of knowledge and skills with experience is key to learning. Students learn best not by reading the Great Books in a closed room but by opening the doors and windows of experience. Learning starts with a problem and continues with the application of increasingly complex ideas and increasingly sophisticated skills to increasingly complicated problems.

Thomas Ehrlich, in: Barbara Jacoby and Associates. Service-Learning in Higher Education: Concepts and Practices. San Francisco, CA: Jossey - Bass, 1996.

A service-learning program provides educational experiences:

- under which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet actual community needs and that are coordinated in collaboration with school and community;
- that are integrated into the students' academic curriculum or provides structured time for a student to think, talk, or write about what the student did and saw during the actual service activity;
- that provide a student with opportunities to use newly-acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their own communities; and
- that enhance what is taught by extending student learning beyond the classroom and into the community and helps to foster the development of a sense of caring for others."

From the Commission on National and Community Service (now the Corporation for National and Community Service). In Richard J. Kraft and James Krug, "Review of Research and Evaluation on Service Learning in Public and Higher Education," Chapter 24 of Richard J. Kraft and Marc Swadener, Building Community: Service Learning in the Academic Disciplines. Denver, CO: Colorado Campus Compact, 1994.

Service-Learning is:

...A connection of theory and practice that puts concepts into concrete form and provides a context for understanding abstract matter. This provides an opportunity to test and refine theories as well as to introduce new theories.

...A use of knowledge with a historical understanding or appreciation of social, economic and environmental implications as well as moral and ethical ramifications of people's actions. This involves a strong use of communication

and interpersonal skills including literacy (writing, reading, speaking and listening) and various technical skills.

...An opportunity to learn how to learn—to collect and evaluate data, to relate seemingly unrelated matters and ideas, and investigate a self-directed learning including inquiry, logical thinking and a relation of ideas and experience. A transference of learning from one context to another will allow for the opportunity to reflect, conceptualize and apply experience-based knowledge.

...An emphasis on diversity and pluralism that leads to empowerment in the face of social problems; experience that helps people understand and appreciate traditions of volunteerism; and a consideration of and experimentation with democratic citizenship responsibilities.

At their best, service-learning experiences are reciprocally beneficial for both the community and students. For many community organizations, students augment service delivery, meet crucial human needs, and provide a basis for future citizen support. For students, community service is an opportunity to enrich and apply classroom knowledge; explore careers or majors; develop civic and cultural literacy; improve citizenship, develop occupational skills; enhance personal growth and self-image; establish job links; and foster a concern for social problems, which leads to a sense of social responsibility and commitment to public/human service.

From Brevard Community College, The Power. July, 1994.

Service-learning is a teaching method which combines community service with academic instruction as it focuses on critical, reflective thinking and civic responsibility. Service-learning programs involve students in organized community service that addresses local needs, while developing their academic skills, sense of civic responsibility, and commitment to the community.

Campus Compact National Center for Community Colleges

Service Learning is a process through which students are involved in community work that contributes significantly: 1) to positive change in individuals, organizations, neighborhoods and/or larger systems in a community; and 2) to students' academic understanding, civic development, personal or career growth, and/or understanding of larger social issues.

This process always includes an intentional and structured educational/developmental component for students, and may be employed in curricular or co-curricular settings. Even with an expanded vision for the field, service-learning will undoubtedly continue to play a critical role in campus-community collaboration..

From Charity to Change Minnesota Campus Compact

Service Learning is 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 course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.

Robert Bringle and Julie Hatcher, A Service Learning Curriculum for Faculty. The Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning, Fall 1995, pp.112-122.