

OUTLINE FOR PLANNING YOUR SERVICE LEARNING COURSE

Service Learning has applications for virtually any curriculum. The challenge is to integrate the academic and service components in ways that tailor the program to meet the specific needs of all participants – instructors, students and community partners. Designing a quality Service Learning course requires planning and forethought to develop a dynamic learning environment that engages students as they take an active role in their own education. You can use the following steps to help you prepare a successful program.

Step 1: Determine whether service learning is right for you.

- What are some of the reasons you are considering incorporating service learning into your courses? To engage your students? To develop a sense of civic responsibility in your students?
- Can service learning classes help you to more effectively realize your teaching objectives?
- What changes would you like to see in your students as a result of participation in a Service Learning course?
- What specific learning outcomes do you expect from a Service Learning course?

Step 2: Consider ways in which community service can be integrated into your course.

- To what extent are the objectives of Service Learning compatible with the needs and values of your students? Are any incompatible?
- What types of activities could students engage in that would help them learn what you are trying to teach them?
- What local agencies, organizations or projects could benefit from student service participation?
- Are there types of students for whom you would not recommend participation in community service activities?

Step 3: Design the course, integrating the Service Learning elements.

- Determine if the Service Learning element will be required or optional. Consider whether the service is central to or on the periphery of the course, and to what extent the success of the course is dependent upon service experiences.
 - If the service element is optional, determine what class will be considered equivalent to community service. How will alternative assignments be weighed against service work? How will class time be managed when all students are not involved in the same activities?
 - If service is required, what type and how much service will be considered adequate? How are the service and non-service requirements related, and how do they work together to satisfy teaching goals?
- Alternative plans must be considered for students who cannot satisfy requirements. Unexpected problems can arise with not only students, but also with partnering agencies.
- Consider transportation needs, safety issues and time lines. Liability releases or waivers may also be required.
- Reflective activities are a vital element in Service Learning programs. There are many types of reflection exercises, with journaling being the most common. Determine which reflection assignments will be most effective in achieving the academic goals of the class.

- Grading and student evaluation is generally more subjective in Service Learning courses than in traditional classes. Determine the criteria on which you will evaluate student performance.
- Decide whether outside texts or other assignments will be needed to supplement the community service work.

Step 4: Develop course material

The first item you will need is a tailored course syllabus. The following items should be given particular attention.

- Course goals: academic and service learning goals should be discussed separately.
- Academic goals: What are the learning goals of the course? How does the incorporation of service change these goals?
- Service component goals: What role will the service components have in achieving the academic goals?
- Service activities and assignments: determine what types of service activities support the academic goals, how placement will be handled, how many service hours will be required, how hours will be recorded, and what activities/assignments can be substituted for service.
- Reflections activities: Decide what types of reflection exercises will best enhance academic goals and encourage understanding of the service provided.
- Texts and other assignments: List all textbooks, readings, papers and projects that will be required.
- Responsibilities and expectations: Detail what each participating party will be responsible for. At a minimum, include:
 - How placement will be handled
 - Who is responsible for transportation
 - How service hours will be tracked/verified
 - How the instructor will be involved
 - How absences will be handled
 - How to handle problems at the placement site
- Grades and student evaluations: discuss how assignments will be evaluated and grades will be determined.

Step 5: Locate community partners

Whether you plan to locate or designate appropriate community partners or delegate this responsibility to your students, the Center for Service Learning (CSL) has a variety of available resources. These include:

- An informative website with links to local and national programs and organizations – www.uta.edu/ccsl.
- Reference materials, including service learning related books, research studies, and computer database.
- Personal placement assistance, by appointment, at the CSL office, 124 Nedderman Hall, 817-272-2124.

When choosing a partner agency, it is important to gather as much information as possible about the agency in order to ensure that the prospective partnership is a good match for both parties. Learn about the organization's goals, expectations, history, philosophy, structure, staff and volunteers. The following questions can help you determine whether you will be compatible.

- What are the goals of the organization?
- Who does the agency serve?
- What is the structure of the agency?
- How does the agency interact with the community?

- What expectations does the agency have of its volunteers?
- What type of service does the agency need?
- What skills or qualities can students develop as a result of working with the agency?
- What type of training/orientation does the agency provide?
- How are volunteers supervised? By whom?
- What kind of feedback or evaluation does the agency provide?

Step 6: Prepare the necessary forms

Contact the CSL office to get the forms and agreements to be used. These include:

- Faculty-Partner Agreement
- Student Guidelines
- Liability Waivers
- Pre- and Post-Surveys
- Student Time Log
- Any other resources and information that CSL can provide