

Workshop on Service-Learning/Civic Engagement “Best Practices” Worksheets

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Workshop Objective

The goal of this workshop is to assist faculty in designing a syllabus for implementing a course with a semester-long civic engagement component based on a “best practices” model of service-learning pedagogy.

Participants will complete worksheets, as time permits, and use them as a basis for problem solving during group discussions. Eventually, worksheets can form the basis for decisions about specific components of a SL course. This process will be followed for each of the SL course design steps:

- 1) Conceptualization/planning (conceptualizing the connection between course learning outcomes and the service activity);
- 2) Operationalization/implementing (effecting the service-learning connection in practice);
- 3) Collaboration/partnering (establishing a mutually effective relationship with the service agency or organization responsible for facilitating the service activity);
- 4) Assessment/evaluating (monitoring the connection between service and learning and assessing if course learning objectives have been met).

We are indebted to our former faculty colleagues at Rhodes College, Thomas McGowan, who assisted our own understanding of service-learning pedagogy and whose wisdom helped to inform parts of the workshop materials.

Service-Learning Pedagogy: Conceptualization/Planning

Overview

Effective service-learning presupposes that the service activity actually enhances the learning of course material. This integration between service activity and the learning of course material must be effected in both theory (conceptualization) and practice (operationalization). The conceptual integration of service activity and coursework involves specifying precisely how the service experience will advance one or more course learning objectives.

Conceptualizing the connection between service and the learning of course material is a crucial step in planning a successful SL course. Without a clear understanding of the way a particular service activity is supposed to advance classroom learning, it is unlikely that the proposed activity will actually contribute to learning.

Definition

Conceptualization is the process of specifying how course objectives will be advanced through service activity. Successful conceptualization provides a clear answer to the question, ‘how will service enhance the learning of course material?’

Conceptualization involves four steps:

- 1) Specify your course learning objectives
- 2) Choose assignments that will advance course learning objectives AND which are measurable.
- 3) As part of the assignments chosen, choose a service activity that will advance one or more course learning objectives
- 4) Describe precisely how the service activity will contribute to the attainment of your course objectives

Examples

Consider the following examples of conceptualization that connect course learning objectives to service:

- a) students will learn statistical skills by applying them in practice
- b) students will understand the dynamics of philanthropy through sustained work with a community-based agency
- c) students will ground their understanding of ritual as performance which negotiates otherness through sustained work with a population outside of their “comfort” zone.

Service-Learning Pedagogy: Operationalization/Implementing

Overview

Earlier we examined the process of conceptualization and identified a service activity that may be used to advance your course objectives and enhance the learning of course material. However, even when an excellent conceptual connection is made between service and learning there is no guarantee that this connection will be realized in practice.

Definition

Operationalization is the process of developing and implementing procedures that ensure that the conceptual connection made between activity and learning is achieved in practice. For example, a clear conceptual connection may be specified between the course objective “examining ageist stereotypes” and the service activity “visiting and assisting homebound elders”. However, the impact of this activity on learning and how it will advance course objectives largely depends on the way the activity is connected to learning through concrete procedures. Identifying and specifying the pedagogical activities that connect service to learning is a crucial step in the process of designing a SL **course**.

Activities connecting service and learning may take place inside the classroom or outside the classroom. Inside-the-classroom activities include briefings, discussions, presentations, performances and exams. Outside-the-classroom activities typically include journal writing, question-guided essays, take-home assignments and the preparation of research papers or reports. In each case, guided reflection on the connection between the service experience and course content is a centerpiece of the activity.

Examples

Consider the following examples of operationalization.

- a) students complete statistical analysis for a community organization
(course objective - learn statistical application skills)
- b) students meet with peers from a historically African-American college to discuss and produce dialogues on racial understanding (course objective - identify a variety of complex factors in cross-racial communication)
- c) students make journal entries reflecting on their interaction with their elder companion guided by specific questions (course objective - examine process of ageist stereotyping)

Examine these cases and discuss how effectively they facilitate the connection between service and learning. From your perspective, which activities seem most effective in facilitating the connection between service and learning? How might a student respond to such activities?

Service-Learning Pedagogy: Collaboration/Partnering

Summary

Successful SL requires a mutually effective relationship with the service agency or organization responsible for facilitating the service activity. The need to establish, sustain and monitor the agency relationship extends the process of a SL **course** design beyond the direct control of the professor and college, presenting the need for effective partnering and collaboration with the host organization. This need introduces a host of “regional” concerns in addition to the conceptualization and operationalization concerns already addressed.

SL professors and college administrators must nurture agency and community relationships in order to establish a mutually beneficial partnership that meets both the professor and agency’s needs. Establishing a working partnership requires dialogue and a clear understanding of respective interests and needs. This worksheet will assist you in articulating your interests and needs, clearing the way for a quality dialogue with an agency representative.

Your own campus resources for service-learning is an indispensable resource in creating powerful relationships with agencies. In the best service-learning courses, community-based agencies become co-educators with the professor and the line between in-class and out-of-class learning is seamlessly blurred.

Exercise

Consider the following questions in order to prepare for our discussion on building a quality agency relationship.

- 1) What are your interests with regard to a particular agency relationship?
- 2) What are your specific needs with regard to the agency’s role in your SL course?
- 3) How will you go about determining the nature of the relationship between your class and the agency? How will you determine whether your goals for the class are compatible with the agency's goals in agreeing to receive the assistance of your class? Are you willing to modify your view of the service activity in order to accommodate the interests of the agency?
- 4) What goods or resources will the agency gain from it’s partnership with your course and/or the institution?
- 5) What kind of supervision, monitoring and documentation do you expect the agency to provide with regard to student activity?
- 6) What ethical concerns might come up as a result of the service provided and the relationships established between you and the agency, the students and agency, or the students and the agency’s clients?

Service-Learning Pedagogy: Assessment/Evaluating

Overview

Once the operational connection is made between service and learning it must be sustained throughout the semester. This requires careful monitoring on behalf of the professor, a process that is technically referred to as assessment. Assessment is considered absolutely essential to the successful implementation of service-learning. The literature indicates that breakdowns in the quality of service-learning are most likely to involve a failure to sustain the operational connection established between service and learning. Simply put, assessment is the process of ensuring that the operational connection made between service and learning is sustained and brought to a successful conclusion.

Definition

Assessment is the process of ensuring that procedures are followed and objectives are achieved. Assessment may be broken into two basic categories. Process assessment provides ongoing feedback on the progress of a SL course, while outcome assessment focuses on the extent to which course objectives have been attained at the conclusion of the semester.

It is important to specify in your SL course planning specific strategies for monitoring the quality of the operational connection between service and learning in order to sustain the connection. It is also helpful to specify outcome success criteria - performances measures that may be used to determine overall course success. (For example, students will be able to explain the key factors affecting the quality of cross-racial dialogue.)

Exercise

You will be asked to analyze a sample student journal entry. After reading the journal entry, respond to the following questions.

- 1) What do you affirm in the entry? Write in the margin one affirmative comment and be prepared to explain your reason for making this comment and wording it as you do.
- 2) What would you challenge in the entry? Write in the margin one challenging comment and be prepared to explain your reason for this comment and wording it as you do.
- 3) Select a judgment made by the student in this entry. On what basis does the student make this judgment? In other words, is the student relying solely on personal beliefs, personal beliefs with other evidence, or evidence and reasoning that go beyond personal beliefs to make the judgment?
- 4) Imagine an example of what you would consider progress for this student identifying evidence to support the particular judgment you selected. Write a comment in the margin that might move the student to make judgments based on sounder evidence, without “tipping your hand” on what you expect the student to say.

- 5) Tell if and why you think it possible (a) to convey to the student at the beginning of the semester what is expected in terms of progress in grounding judgments made about the service experience, and (b) whether such progress can be evaluated and graded objectively.

Below are some more general questions to consider in thinking about your approach to assessment. It is critically important to specify in your SL course plan specific monitoring strategies to sustain the operational connection made between service and learning. Specifically, what procedures will you use to monitor the connections students draw between service and learning?

- 1) How will you monitor the operational connection between service and learning to ensure that the learning dimension of SL is sustained throughout the semester?
- 2) How will you measure student performance outcomes so as to judge whether the service activity has advanced one or more course learning objectives?
- 3) How will you evaluate student work related to the service activity (i.e., journals, reflection papers, creative performance)? What percentage of the course grade will reflect the SL course component?
- 4) What proposal(s) can you offer for institutional assessment of the impact of service-learning courses on student learning and curriculum development?