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## What Do Students Learn from Service-Learning and How Do We Know It?

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# TEACHING

AT ISU

## What Do Students Learn from Service-Learning and How Do We Know It?

Scott A. Chadwick, Assistant Professor, Greenlee School of Journalism/Communication

Service-learning presents a unique opportunity for those interested in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). This opportunity exists because relatively little empirical research has been conducted on the efficacy of service-learning with respect to the intended learning outcomes designed into the course by the teacher.

A substantial body of work exists explicating best practices, student and teacher attitudes toward service-learning, and social outcomes. This scholarship is important, but not sufficient. Some scholarship focusing on learning outcomes of service-learning exists, yet not enough to constitute a complete body of research literature (Eyler, Giles, & Gray,

2000).

Service-learning requires an intentional combination of course content, application of that content in the community, and post-service reflection on the content, the service to the community, and how those two affect each other. Service-learning courses are defined as

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courses able to fully integrate meaningful community service activities, academic learning outcomes, and student reflection on both (ISU Service-Learning Task Force, 2000).

As with most definitions of teaching and learning, our definition stops short of the final step of the teaching - learning process: assessment used as a feedback mechanism used to improve teaching and learning.

As with all types of teacher-learner interactions, our improvements in teaching and learning are based on our knowledge of what helps students learn. Findings from research will allow us to engage in informed discourse about our teaching practices both within and across our academic disciplines. That discourse will facilitate our becoming better teachers, and students becoming better learners.

### Assessment Rubrics

Furco (1998) argues that a continuum of learning is possible in well-designed service-learning courses. Students will learn about (1) performing service to the community, (2) the social issue connected to the service, and (3)

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course content upon which the service is based. Through their experiences and reflection on their service students will learn about civic responsibility. Through their course work and reflection on how that and their service are connected they will achieve academically. To be complete, assessments of service-learning must focus on all aspects of service-learning continuum.

There are multiple ways to assess service-learning. One rubric of assessment focuses on the types of student learning and development possible through service-learning. Split across cognitive and affective dimensions, four areas of assessment are possible: (1) better understanding of larger social issues and their root causes (cognitive), (2) development of civic responsibility and civic participation skills (cognitive and affective), (3) personal and career development (affective — with some cognitive dimensions), and (4) increased academic understanding (cognitive) (Minnesota Campus Compact, 1995).

### Assessment Methods

As with other types of research, the methods used are dependent on the questions asked. Thus, there is no one right way to assess service-learning. Each teacher on our campus comes from a particular position of strength with his or her scholarship. Investigating service-learning from quantitative and qualitative points of view are appropriate, given the particular focus of the study. Teachers en-

gaged in service-learning, or other types of learning facilitation, will learn what works best in the classroom as we collectively apply our scholarship strengths to investigate the effects of pedagogical practices on intended learning outcomes, then share our findings.

Participation in those courses showed significant positive effects on academic performance (i.e., GPA, writing skills, and critical thinking skills) as well as diversity-related values, self-efficacy, and leadership.

When service-learning is assessed, the goal should be to (1) explicate causal relationships between teachers' and students' behaviors and learning outcomes, (2) illuminate the process through which learning is best accomplished, (3) provide sufficient detail so others may incorporate successful pedagogical practices in their classes, and (4) clearly delineate the domain across which the research findings apply.

Scholarship of service-learning can be conducted at various levels. For example, Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, and Yee (2000) collected longitudinal data from a national sample of students who had completed service-learning courses at baccalaureate-granting colleges and universities. Participation in those

courses showed significant positive effects on academic performance (i.e., GPA, writing skills, and critical thinking skills) as well as diversity-related values, self-efficacy, and leadership.

Bradley (1995) suggests assessing students' ability to reflect upon their service experience and its relationship to course content by looking at the level at which students are engaged in the reflection process. He proposes three levels of reflective ability.

Level 1 reflection reports observations, is unidimensional in nature, and bases analysis and conclusions on personal beliefs rather than substantiated facts.

Reflection reports at Level 3 demonstrate a student's ability to take multiple perspectives on the service experience, identify and incorporate the contingent nature of social situations and people acting within them, and reaches conclusions based on logical reasoning and available evidence.

As with other qualitative assessment methods, performance at Level 2 falls between the more obvious examples of the very good of Level 3 and the inadequate of Level 1.

At the institutional level, Bringle and Hatcher (2000) report that the extent to which service-learning becomes a meaningful aspect of faculty work, student life, institutional identity, and external partnerships is in some ways dependent on the type of institution (e.g., com-

munity college vs. land grant university) and on the extent to which service-learning is supported through a centralized office within the chief academic officer's organization.

### Learning more

The AAHE maintains a Web site with information regarding how service-learning is evaluated at colleges throughout the country (see the answers to question #43 at <http://www.aahe.org/service/models.htm>). Currently, 25 schools share their evaluation strategies there.

Campus Compact is a national coalition of college and university presidents whose primary purpose is to help students develop the values and skills of citizenship through campus-based service-learning. Founded in 1985 by the presidents of Brown, Georgetown, and Stanford universities, Campus Compact has a membership of 620 public and private two- and four-year colleges and universities (<http://www.compact.org>).

On our campus, a database of service-learning courses and teachers is currently being developed (see sidebar article). Beyond the Web, the CTE library has a variety of resources, including a file box of materials such as *Introduction to Service-Learning Tool Kit: Readings and Resources for Faculty*, articles and reports, and a file on assessment issues and sample syllabi, as well as helpful staff knowledgeable about service-learning.

Astin, A. W., Vogelgesang, L. J., Ikeda, E. K., & Yee, J. A. (2000). *How service learning affects students*. Los Angeles, CA: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

Bradley, J. (1995). A model for evaluating student learning in academically based service. In Troppe, M. (Ed.), *Connecting cognition and action: Evaluation of student performance in service learning courses* (pp. 13-26). Providence, RI: Campus Compact.

Bringle, R. G., & Hatcher, J. A. (2000). Institutionalization of service learning in higher education. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 71(3), 273-290.

Eyler, J., Giles, D. E., & Gray, C. J. (2000). Research at a glance: What we know about the effects of service-learning on students, faculty, institutions, and communities, 1993-1999. In *Introduction to service-learning toolkit: Readings and resources for faculty*. Providence, RI: Campus Compact.

Furco, A. (1998). *Aspects of student learning in service-learning*. Unpublished manuscript, University of California, Berkeley.

ISU Service-Learning Task Force. (2000, November). *Service-learning defined* (Unpublished meeting document). Ames: Iowa State University.

Minnesota Campus Compact. (1995). *"Learning": Maximizing student outcomes*. Minneapolis, MN.

## Data Base

Beverly Madden, member of the ISU Service-Learning Task Force, is developing a university-wide database of ISU courses with a service-learning component. If you teach a service-learning course or know someone who does, please contact her at [bsmadden@iastate.edu](mailto:bsmadden@iastate.edu) or 294-9490.

Service-learning courses are defined as courses able to fully integrate meaningful community service activities, academic learning outcomes, and student reflection (ISU Service-Learning Task Force, 2000).

The database will consist of the following fields, edited for brevity. Please provide the following information:

- Instructor(s) and department
- Course title, number and credit hours
- Community partner and location
- Brief description of service-learning
- How service is integrated with curriculum content
- The reflective element
- Type of assessment(s) used

The ISU Service-Learning Task Force is a group of faculty and staff who recently attended the Minnesota Service-Learning Institute: Scott Chadwick, Shari Ellertson, Nancy Guthrie, Beverly Madden, Sharon Patterson McGuire, and Rhonda Wiley-Jones.