

Quick Guides

Service-Learning Courses

Handbook of Best Practices

Service-Learning Course Criteria

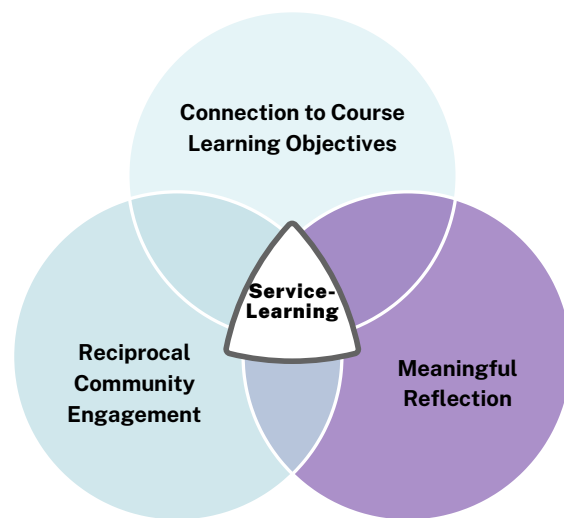
A service-learning designated course at WCU engages faculty and students in partnership with the community to link classroom content with volunteer projects that address public needs. In addition to a hallmark community service activity, these credit bearing courses include intentional preparation for the project and meaningful critical reflection throughout the course to increase students' understanding of the academic content, improve the quality of the service, and enhance students' sense of responsibility to the wider good.

Service-Learning pedagogy has three main goals:

- Deepen students' knowledge of course content
- Create benefits for the community
- Strengthen students' sense of civic and social responsibility

Service-Learning Course Criteria

Though service-learning courses may occur in any discipline, major, or at any level, all designated SLCs at WCU embody the principles and practices of service-learning pedagogy and the growing field of community engaged teaching and learning. As such, SLCs must include:



Reciprocal benefits to community, faculty, and students

- Direct link between the service project(s) and course learning objectives
- Community service project(s) that address a need identified by the community partner and offer significant immersion for the students; a minimum of 10 hours of work applied to the service and ideally 20 or more
- Preparation for the service project, including information about the community partner and the related social issue(s)
- Structured, rigorous reflection integrated throughout the course to deepen the connection between the service experience and academic course content, to facilitate understanding of community engagement, and to explore personal learning
- Partnership and ongoing contact between faculty member and community partner(s), with the partners' knowledge being incorporated into the education
- Grading procedures that assess the students' knowledge and critical analysis of the experience vis-à-vis the course learning objectives (not for the service alone)
- Opportunity for community partners to provide feedback about the project(s), students, and the service-learning process

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Timeline Steps for Designing SLC

6-8 Months Prior

	Create or review course goals and objectives.
	Identify which course goals or objectives could be met through experience.
	Further imagine what these experiential activities could be.
	Brainstorm potential populations or environments that may benefit from these activities.
	Research related community service organizations or contact CCESL for referrals, curating a list of potential partners.
	Draft syllabus, formulating initial reflection plans and grading policies.
	Apply for service-learning course designation through CCESL (typically beginning of Feb for summer/fall courses and beginning of Oct for spring courses)

3 Months Prior

	Reach out to initiate conversations with potential partner(s) and establish likely partner(s).
	Refine shared goals, project scope, timeline, logistics and expectations with community partner, including role as co-educator.
	Finalize syllabus, preparation/reflection, and grading rubrics.
	Continue to build partnership with selected community organization(s)

1 Month - 1 Week Prior

	Meet with community partner to finalize project plan, establish check in meeting dates/times, go over syllabus together, and anticipate/plan for potential problems.
	Send email to students to reconfirm course as service-learning and review service-learning components and expectations.

During the Semester

	Prepare students for community engagement with background, context, and academic instruction.
	Distribute the CCESL Student Safety Packet and collect signed waiver forms from students.
	Conduct regular check ins with community partner(s) and students.
	Troubleshoot problems and unexpected challenges.
	Facilitate critical reflection, provide feedback, and assess student learning prior, during, and after project.
	Invite community partner evaluation of student work.
	Provide thank you to community partner and celebrate project work with students.
	Distribute and complete CCESL Service-Learning Survey (faculty, students, community); send final syllabus, project description and names of community partners to CCESL
	Hold debriefing meeting with community partner to review and evaluate overall experience with service-learning course and process.

References & Resources

- Carolina Center for Public Service [Apples Service-Learning Series: Course Planning and Design](#). PDF available [here](#).
- Jenkins, A., & Sheehey, P. (2011). A Checklist for Implementing Service-Learning in Higher Education. *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*: 4(2), 52-60. Article available online [here](#). Article PDF available [here](#).

Constructing a SLC Syllabus

By incorporating best practices into the syllabus document, you will develop a solid service-learning curriculum as well as communicate crucial information regarding the experience to students. Below are key elements of a service-learning syllabus, each guided by a specific best practice.

Student Learning Outcomes

Best Practice: Explicitly Link Course Learning Outcomes to the Community Service Experience

A syllabus that clearly and repeatedly demonstrates connections between the academic content and the community service informs students of the expectations and provides an integrated learning experience.

In The Syllabus, include:

- Learning outcomes, noting which ones are tied to the service project
- Summary of the service project(s) and the community partner(s)
- Brief description of how service project will enhance learning & meet community-identified need
- [WCU Statement of Service Learning](#)

Questions to Consider:

- What do you want students to know or be able to do by the end of the course?
- Which of these learning goals could be enhanced through experiential activities?
- What types of activities would facilitate the learning?
- What has the community stated is needed?

Preparation

Best Practice: Prepare Students for the Service Experience

Preparation provides students with context, information, and knowledge to better learn and to better contribute to the community.

In The Syllabus, include preparation related to:

- Awareness of assumptions
- Expectations and guidelines for participation
- Orientation to community partner
- Information about the social issue(s) involved
- Discipline-specific knowledge

Questions to Consider:

- How can the community partner contribute to this preparation?
- How can the perspective of those with lived experience be incorporated?

Critical Reflection

Best Practice: Structure Purposeful Reflection Activities Throughout The Course, Providing Feedback and Challenge along The Way

Reflective and analytical activities are intentionally integrated throughout different stages of the class to facilitate and deepen student learning towards course objectives.

In The Syllabus, include:

- Indication of which activities are designed as critical reflection
- Reflection activities before, during, and after the service
- Reflection activities designed to connect the service experience and academic course content, to facilitate understanding of community engagement, and to explore personal learning.

Questions to Consider:

- Does the portfolio of critical reflection activities provide opportunities to analyze discipline-specific knowledge, community participation skills, AND values related to social responsibility?
- How can the reflection incorporate different modes, formats, people, and locations?

Grading and Assessment

Best Practice: Students Receive Grades For Learning That Is Demonstrated

Assessment remains focused on evaluation vis-à-vis the learning outcomes for the course, not just credit given for attendance or participation.

In The Syllabus, include:

- Grading policies/procedures that illustrate requirement to demonstrate learning for grade
- Metrics showing that service and service-learning components are a significant percentage of course grade

Questions to Consider:

- What rubric or guidance will help students understand the expectations for demonstrated learning?

Sample Syllabi

These syllabi are from the [Campus Compact Syllabi Library](#). While they are not WCU courses, taken collectively, these syllabi provide examples of many of the best practices described above.

Click on the links below to view the sample syllabi:

- [Community Organizing](#)
- [Kinematics and Dynamics of Machinery](#)
- [Early Literacy Instruction](#)
- [Marine Biology and Tropical Ecology](#)
- [Qualitative Research in Psychology](#)
- [Organizational Consulting](#)

References & Resources

- Pawlowski, D. R. (2018). From the classroom to the community: Best practices in service-learning. *Journal of Communication Pedagogy*, 1, 85-92. Article available online [here](#). Article PDF available [here](#).

Preparing Students

Introduction

What is important for students to know before starting the community service project? Perhaps this is already naturally included in the traditional teaching approach of your course - planned readings, homework, and activities. And yet, teaching within the service-learning pedagogy and working with communities requires additional, intentional preparation to be integrated into the course.

Below is an outline of topics and potential resources to consider when preparing students for their service work. Imagine how community partners can also be included as co-educators in the design and implementation of preparing students. What preparation do the community partners think is needed? How will the perspective of those with lived experience with the social issues be included in the preparation?

Awareness of Assumptions

How will you prepare students to be aware of potential assumptions regarding the project or population? How will you orient them to the concept of service-learning and challenge assumptions/conceptions about volunteering?

Example Strategies

Discussion/Journaling

What facts do you know for sure? What do you imagine? What story are you telling yourself?

Panel Discussion

Invite community partners to share about their mission, work, services, and connection to broader social issues.

Expectations and Guidelines for Participation

How will you prepare students for the logistics related to the project, such as transportation, hours, and contact person? What are the expectations for student conduct, safety, and professionalism from both WCU and the community partner? What guidelines does the community partner have for interactions with clients or behavior at the site?

Example Strategies

Students develop class conduct contract as a group

Facilitate class discussion regarding key points in the CCESL student packet, such as behavioral expectations and safety tips.

Zoom meeting with contact at community partner organization

Orientation to Community Organization/Partner

How will the students be oriented to the community partner? Its mission, programs, and staff?

Example Strategies:

- Guest Speaker
- Research assignment
- On-site orientation

Context of Social Issue(s)

What social issues are relevant context to the project? What wider systems and policies impact the community partner/population?

Example Strategies:

- Guest Speakers
- Film, video
- Group research project/presentation

Discipline-Specific Knowledge and Skills

What academic/discipline-specific preparation and knowledge is needed for the project? What is needed in the beginning, during, and by the end?

Example Strategies:

- Readings
- Practice Assignments
- Tests, quizzes

References & Resources

- Stanford University, Haas Center for Public Service [Cardinal Courses Workbook](#). PDF available [here](#).

Developing the Project and Partnership

Introduction

Essential components of service-learning pedagogy include a service project that meets a **community identified need** and a **partnership that is reciprocal**. These two concepts serve as guiding principles for the development and implementation of the community service project.

Types of Engagement

Service projects may incorporate one or more of the following types of engagement:

Direct Service

Students learn about the community partner and clients through volunteerism at the site

Indirect Service

The partner brings a community problem to the students, who primarily work on the project in the classroom or other off-site locations.

Research & Advocacy

Students gather information about an area of interest for the partner or work to create awareness of action regarding a community need.

Outline of Developing a Community Project and Partnership

Identify Potential Partners



- Create or review course goals and objectives.
- Identify which course goals or objectives could be enhanced through experience.
- Further imagine what these experiences could look like or involve.
- Brainstorm potential populations or environments that may benefit from these activities.
- Research related community organizations and/or contact CCESL for a consultation/referrals.

Meet, Share, and Listen



- Reach out to initiate conversations with potential partner(s).
- Consider meeting at the community site.
- Share about your course, the definition of service-learning, and student/faculty skills.
- Learn about community organization assets, goals, physical environment/location, and needs.
- Listen for needs that overlap with course objectives and student/faculty skills.
- Brainstorm projects with partner and assess for overall compatibility with students/course.
- Discuss both limitations and benefits to working with students/service-learning courses.

Confirm and Develop

Once you have identified a project/organization match...



- Further define shared goals, scope, timeline, and deliverables of project in collaboration with partner.
- Mutually establish expectations and inputs/responsibilities of the organization, faculty, and students towards project.
- Provide organization/partner with copy of syllabus.
- Consider adapting and completing the [Project Scope Infosheet](#) in collaboration with partner.



Communicate, Adjust, Assess

- Maintain communication- visits to site, invitations to class, regular check-ins via email/phone/video call.
- Initiate opportunities for feedback along the way and follow through on needed adjustments.
- Schedule final debrief and assessment with partner regarding project and partnership.



Celebrate and Thank

- Celebrate project with students and community partner
- Provide a thank you note or momento
- Invite partners to project showcase/presentations, if applicable

Principles of Partnership

Below, find some principles to consider and adapt as you build the relationship with your community partner. Sourced from CCPH Board of Directors. Position Statement on Authentic Partnerships. Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, 2013.

- The Partnership forms to serve a specific purpose and may take on new goals over time.
- The Partnership agrees upon mission, values, goals, measurable outcomes and processes for accountability.
- The relationship between partners in the Partnership is characterized by mutual trust, respect, genuineness, and commitment.
- The Partnership builds upon identified strengths and assets, but also works to address needs and increase capacity of all partners.
- The Partnership balances power among partners and enables resources among partners to be shared.
- Partners make clear and open communication an ongoing priority in the Partnership by striving to understand each other's needs and self-interests, and developing a common language.
- Principles and processes for the Partnership are established with the input and agreement of all partners, especially for decision-making and conflict resolution.
- There is feedback among all stakeholders in the Partnership, with the goal of continuously improving the Partnership and its outcomes.
- Partners share the benefits of the Partnership's accomplishments.
- Partnerships can dissolve, and when they do, need to plan a process for closure.
- Partnerships consider the nature of the environment within which they exist as a principle of their design, evaluation, and sustainability.
- The Partnership values multiple kinds of knowledge and life experiences.

References & Resources

- Brown, E. (2015, October). Strategies for establishing mutually-beneficial service learning partnerships. Division of Community Engagement. Virginia Commonwealth University: Richmond, VA. Available online [here](#). PDF available [here](#).
- Carolina Center for Public Service [Apples Service-Learning Series: Course Planning and Design](#). PDF available [here](#).
- Stanford University, Haas Center for Public Service [Cardinal Courses Workbook](#).

Reflection & Grading

Reflection

Facilitating meaningful reflection is a crucial component of service-learning and is an area where the faculty member has an essential role, utilizing both their academic expertise and skill as a teacher to challenge students to analyze their service experience, not just have a service experience.

At a minimum, reflection activities or assignments should:

- Be an integrated component and occur throughout the course- at least once prior to the project, once during, and once after.
- Prompt students to reflect on multiple levels- on the academic/discipline specific learning, on the related social issues tied to the community need/partner, and on their personal values/sense of community responsibility.

There are many pedagogical reflection tools and formats for you to utilize, selecting those that best match your teaching approach, academic discipline, and service project.

Below, please find a chart to assist you in creating a reflection plan, as well as some ideas and examples of critical reflection (Eyler, 2002):

	Before Service	During Service	After Service
Reflect Alone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter to self • Goal statement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflective Journal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual paper • Film, artwork
Reflect with Classmates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore “hopes and fears” • Contrast expert views 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List serve discussions • Critical incident analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team presentation
Reflect with Community Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create contract • Needs assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Lessons learned” - on site debriefing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation to community partner

Types of Critical Reflection Activities

- Journal Entries with structured prompts and/or reflection questions
- Presentations
- Fish Bowl Discussions
- Research Assignments
- Discussion Board Posts
- Small Group/Dyad Discussions

Sample Critical Reflection Prompts

(Adapted from Jacoby, B. (2015). *Service-Learning Essentials: Questions, Answers, and Lessons Learned*, p34-35. Jossey-Bass.)

Linking Service and Academic Learning

- What course concepts relate to your service work? How were they different or similar to what you learned in the “textbook” sense?
- Based on your service work so far, where do you stand related to the author’s assertions?
- How would you approach applying the material to other situations in the future?

Social Issues/Civic Engagement

- What are the symptoms of the problem? What are the causes? What systems contribute to the problem? What systems changes could help?
- What are you learning about the social issue while engaging in the service work?
- What ethical dilemmas or concerns are emerging for you?

Personal Knowledge/Values

- What assumptions or expectations are you bringing to this experience?
- What assumptions were reinforced? Which were challenged?
- How have you changed as a result of this experience? What have you learned about yourself?

Reflection Model

There are a variety of reflection models that have been routinely utilized in service-learning. Below, find more detailed information about one of these, the DEAL Model for Critical Reflection (Ash & Clayton, 2009). The DEAL Model was created within service-learning and includes guiding students through the following three steps:

- **Description - What happened, as objectively as possible**
- **Examination - Analyze the experience vis-à-vis specific theories, learning objectives**
- **Articulation of Learning - What is the meaning/learning? What conclusions/goals/steps can now be tested in the future?**

For more information, please read Ash, S. & Clayton, P. (2009). *Generating, Deepening, and Documenting Learning: The Power of Critical Reflection in Applied Learning*. *Journal of Applied Learning in Higher Education*. 1. 25-48. Available online [here](#).

Grading

One of the goals of service-learning is to deepen the educational experience. An extension of this is grading and assessing student learning. In grading the service-learning, assessment is not based solely on participation in the service project, but incorporates and evaluates the depth of learning, mastery of course learning objectives, and quality of reflection. Below, please find an example of a grading plan for a service-learning course, as well as a sample grading rubric for reflection:

Sample Grading Plan

- Weekly Quizzes - 10%
- Mini-paper on Community Partner - 10%
- Mid-Term Exam - 20%
- Active Attendance & Participation in Class/Service Project - 10%
- Service-Learning Project Deliverable (ex. workshop, marketing plan, needs assessment) - 40%
- Service-Learning Reflection Journals - 10%

Sample Grading Rubric (Sourced from Bowen, G. (2007). Reflection in Service Learning. Evaluation/Reflection. 24.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Give examples of observed behaviors or characteristics of the client or settings, but provides no insight into reasons behind the observation; observations tend to be one dimensional and conventional, or unassimilated repetitions of what has been heard in class or from peers 2. Tends to focus on just one aspect of the situation 3. Uses unsupported personal belief as frequently as “hard” evidence 4. May acknowledge differences of perspective but does not discriminate effectively among them 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Observations are fairly thorough and nuanced although they tend not to be placed in a broader context 2. Provides a cogent critique from one perspective, but fails to see the broader system in which the aspect is embedded and other factors which may make change difficult 3. Uses both unsupported personal beliefs and evidence but is beginning to be able to differentiate between them 4. Perceives legitimate differences of viewpoint 5. Demonstrates a beginning ability to interpret evidence 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Views things from multiple perspectives; able to observe multiple aspects of the situation and place them in context 2. Perceives conflicting goals within and among the individuals involved in a situation and recognizes that the differences can be evaluated 3. Recognizes that the actions must be situationally dependent and understands many of the factors which affect their choice 4. Makes appropriate judgments based on reasoning and evidence 5. Has a reasonable assessment of the importance of the decisions facing clients and of his or her responsibility as a part of the clients’ lives

References & Resources

- Ash, S. L., & Clayton, P. H. (2009). Generating, deepening, and documenting learning: The power of critical reflection in applied learning. *Journal of Applied Learning in Higher Education*, 1(1), 25-48. Available online [here](#). PDF available [here](#).
- Bowen, G. (2007). Reflection in Service Learning. Evaluation/Reflection. 24. Available online [here](#).
- Canada, M., & Speck, B. (2001). Developing and Implementing Service-Learning Programs: New Directions for Higher Education, no.114. Jossey-Bass.
- Eyler, J. (2002). Reflection: Linking Service and Learning—Linking Students and Communities. *Journal of Social Issues*. 58. 10.1111/1540-4560.00274.
- Jacoby, B. (2015). Service-Learning Essentials: Questions, Answers, and Lessons Learned. Jossey-Bass.

Evaluating Impact

Service-learning provides opportunity to study, research, and evaluate impact on multiple levels. Some examples include:

**Student Learning
Outcomes**

**Community/Client
Impact**

**Community-University
Partnerships**

Consider how you will evaluate these three components for yourself at the end of your service-learning course. What was achieved? What worked? What could be adjusted, changed, or improved? How can you include the student and community perspective in answering these questions?

Sample Service-Learning Feedback Methods

- Group discussion with community partners and students focused on, if doing it again, what would we do more of, less of, keep the same?
- Qualtrics/online survey (provided by CCESL)
- Analysis of student assignments
- Debriefing meeting with community partner

Community-Engaged Scholarship

Thinking more broadly, consider conducting formal scholarly research based on your service-learning activities. This can include scholarship on teaching and learning (SOTL) or linking your service-learning course activities to your discipline-specific research through community-engaged research.

Community-engaged research is characterized by research conducted in partnership with communities to explore an issue that is a priority to them, that involves the community in the research development process, and produces knowledge that is shared and accessible to the community, in addition to contributing to the academic discipline. Research may be published in journals focused on community engagement or in discipline specific journals.

Below, find journals that publish research related to community-engaged learning. There are many more journals for publication related to service-learning. WCU's [Hunter Library Research Guide on Community Engaged Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship](#) provides a more comprehensive list.

Be sure to complete the WCU Faculty Activities Database each year and include information about your service-learning and community-engaged teaching, scholarship, and participation.

Examples of Journals on Community Engagement

- [Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning](#)
- [International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement](#)
- [Journal of Service-Learning in Higher Education](#)
- [International Journal of Service Learning in Engineering](#)

Sample Methods for Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL)

- Surveys
- Achievement Testing
- Content Analysis of Student Work
- Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Observation
- Document Review
- Case Studies

References & Resources

- Jacoby, B., & Mutascio, P. (Eds.). (2010). Looking in, reaching out: A reflective guide for community service-learning professionals. Campus Compact.
- Jacoby, B. (2015). Service-Learning Essentials: Questions, Answers, and Lessons Learned. Jossey-Bass.

What To Expect?

Common Challenges and Related Tips

Expect to Adjust

Working with community partners and members is very different than working in a controlled laboratory setting, as changing conditions can shift the environment, capacity, and resources involved in unanticipated ways. Some past examples include; the death of an important staff or board member of the community organization, change in volunteer policies/systems, and unanticipated limitations due to size/physical capacity of community partners' building.

Tips

- Utilize the change as a reflection/learning/teaching moment for your class - What are students observing/feeling? What can be learned from the situation? How does this change reflect what happens in the real world?
- Involve students in generating and selecting options for adjusting to the change.

Expect Different Schedules

One of the biggest challenges can be finding common ground in the schedules of faculty, students, community contacts, academic calendars, classes, fundraising events... you get the picture!

Tips

- Strike a balance - Be willing to utilize some classroom instruction time for the community project, especially for crucial components where all stakeholders need to be present.

Expect Changes in Learning Goals and Learning Outcomes

Working on real world problems with community partners is a dynamic process and the "ideal" goals may not always be achievable as originally planned.

Tips

- Be okay with what is possible versus perfect.
- Look for and embrace the emergence of new goals, outcomes, and learnings.

Expect To Consult With CCESL and Other SLC Faculty

The Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning is available as a resource for faculty throughout the SLC process. CCESL staff can provide consultation, collaboration, and referrals to navigate opportunities and challenges that emerge. Please don't hesitate to contact us.