UNIT 1: UNDERSTANDING SERVICE-LEARNING

COMPETENCIES
After completing this unit, you will be able to:
- Explain the definition, theoretical basis, and key components of service-learning
- Describe how service-learning differs from other forms of experiential learning
- Describe the impacts of service-learning

HANDOUTS
- What is Service-Learning?
- Mott Community College Case Study

DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS
- **Service-Learning** – Service-learning is a pedagogy that integrates meaningful community-engaged service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities.
- **Community** – A group that shares common characteristics or interests and that is perceived or that perceives itself as distinct in some respect from the larger society in which it exists.
- **Partnership** – A close mutual cooperation between parties having shared interests, responsibilities, privileges, and power.
- **Student** – A student represents all levels of learning in a higher education context, including associate, undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate level learners.

INTRODUCTION
Service-learning is a pedagogy that integrates meaningful community-engaged service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. Service-learning provides college and university students with a community context to their education, allowing them to connect their academic coursework to their roles as citizens in a democracy.

The Education Commission of the States defines service-learning as the potent combination of meaningful service to the community, academically rigorous classroom education and deliberate, structured reflection so that students connect the service they perform to course objectives. Service-learning is not just about "going out and doing good." It involves learning and intellectual skills, performing needed service and producing real results that command respect. Service-learning provides students with the skills and attitudes that enable them to participate fully in a civil society and contribute to the sustainability of our democracy.

Additional information can be found on the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse site and on the Barbara A. Holland Collection for Service Learning and Community Engagement.

DEFINING SERVICE-LEARNING

- What is service-learning?
- What are the characteristics of service-learning?

THEORETICAL BASIS FOR SERVICE-LEARNING

Seifer (1998) and Furco (1996) argue that although service-learning is a form of experiential learning, there are key areas where service-learning departs from traditional models of experiential learning. For example, service-learning has a greater emphasis on reciprocal learning and reflection. Further, service-learning is focused on developing a more engaged civil sector that can affect real and lasting social change. Service-learning pedagogy ensures that goals and objectives as well as overall curriculum structure are premised on collaboration. The extent to which identified community needs inform course structure and/or community organizations function as integral partners differentiates service learning from experiential pedagogies such as internships or field studies. In other words, the value proposition of service-learning is not as one-sided as it is with volunteering, nor does service-learning have the technical or the individual development focus of an internship or field study. As such, it can be difficult to quantify the success of a service-learning initiative. This added complexity, combined with service-learning's differences from traditional educational models, can make the marketing of service-learning to key decision makers challenging.

Despite the challenges, service-learning has proven to be an innovative and effective education methodology that is grounded in scholarship. The Kolb model describes the key stages that service-learners cycle through in their educational processes: 1) concrete experiences, 2) reflective observation, 3) abstract conceptualization, and 4) active experimentation. Each of these four stages is an integral part of service-learning that must be fully embraced by students, institutions, and community partners in order for service-learning's multi-faceted goals to be achieved.

Service-learning takes into account the needs of adult learners and uses appropriate methods and resources to facilitate meaningful learning and discovery. These practices include (Curriculum Development Manual, 2002):

- Reforming the role of the teacher or instructor as a *facilitator* of knowledge rather than a *controller* of knowledge.
- Ensuring that learning by doing is at the center of discovery.
- Engaging the learner in ongoing critical reflection on what is being experienced for effective learning.
- Ensuring that learners help to direct and shape the learning experiences.
- Ensuring that new knowledge, concepts, and skills are linked in meaningful ways to the learner's personal experiences.

THE IMPACTS OF SERVICE-LEARNING

Service-learning can provide students with "transformational learning experiences." Service-learning increases community understanding among faculty and can bring new directions and confidence to the teaching and scholarly pursuits of the faculty involved. For community partners, participation in service-learning can contribute to economic, operational, and social benefits. Eyler, Giles, Stenson, and Gray (2001) conducted a scan of documented impacts from service-learning experiences on a variety of stakeholders and for a variety of outcomes. Access that report here: At a Glance: What We Know about The Effects of Service-Learning on College Students, Faculty, Institutions and Communities, 1993- 2000: Third Edition.

STRUCTURING SERVICE-LEARNING FOR SUCCESS

Evaluations of service-learning programs have explored the factors that are most commonly associated with successful community-campus partnerships. These factors include joint planning, a genuine sense of reciprocity, clear definitions of roles and activities, a comprehensive student orientation and preparation process, and consistent communication with a primary point of contact on each side. Evaluations have also found that in order for higher education institutions to build institutional capacity around service-learning, they need to clearly define their mission and goals, generate multi-level support, invest in faculty development, nurture long-term community partnerships, and integrate service-learning into the administrative structures and policies of the institution as well as the broader curriculum. Many institutions of higher education have created their own structures and programs for in-depth faculty development specific to service-learning. These models are useful tools as you identify which structures and programs are the best fit for your institution and faculty. For example, the Faculty Coordinator for Service-Learning at SUNY Oneonta created an [Academic Service-Learning Faculty Handbook](#) for consistency in defining and designing high-quality service-learning courses at that institution.

For service-learning to work well for community partners, community partners need to ensure that service-learning is closely aligned with their organizational goals as well as complementary to their overall mission. Furthermore, they need to develop internal structures to support their involvement in service-learning as well as adopt the perspective that the students involved in service-learning have valuable skills and expertise to contribute.

In part, the success of a service-learning course depends on course design and the "fit" of that design with the needs of the community partner and the identified student learning outcomes. Service-learning courses typically fall into one of the following three categories:

- **Traditional:** Engaging in direct or indirect service (often place-based) that addresses a community-identified need;
- **Research-based:** Gathering, compiling, and presenting information that addresses a community-identified need;
- **Advocacy:** Educating others about topics of public interest to create awareness and action specific to a community-identified need.

Iowa Campus Compact created a [Service-Learning Course Design brainstorming activity](#) to assist faculty in thinking about the various categories of service-learning course construction and levels of student engagement within those categories. That tool is included at the end of Unit 1.

Increasingly, faculty members are looking for ways to provide students with community-engaged learning experiences within online courses. Though little has been published about e-service-learning, several resources do exist. The Office of Civic Engagement at the University of Montana developed [a training presentation for e-service-learning](#) that may be helpful to use with faculty at your institution. A wealth of information and resources can also be found through Minnesota Campus Compact and the [Center for Digital Civic Engagement](#). Additionally, many faculty members are utilizing technology to communicate course objectives, expectations, service requirements, and assessment criteria to students within classroom-based courses. For example, Professor Jim Spickard at University of Redlands created a full [website](#) to clearly articulate course information in a way that appeals to most students.

FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF SERVICE-LEARNING COURSE DESIGN

Dahan and Seligsohn (2013) developed a matrix for assessing the quality of engaged civic learning courses for faculty at Rutgers-Camden. The matrix serves as a useful tool in looking at high-quality service-learning course construction. While drafted in terms of engaged civic learning, the elements translate to designing, implementing, and assessing service-learning courses so that they are consistent. The elements are as follows:

- Integration of experience with learning goals and other course elements
- Opportunity for analysis of and/or reflection on experience
- Substantial experiential or community-focused component in which all students are required to participate
- Appropriate student preparation for experiential activity (e.g. training, orientation, etc.)
- Appropriate partnership
- Appropriate distribution of benefits
- Integration of the engaged civic learning component into student assessment
- Sharing of information or findings with community partners and/or others.

Access the workbook here.

Michigan State University (MSU) developed a Quality Components of Service-Learning tool that breaks service-learning into stages of investigation, preparation, engagement, reflection and connection, evaluation, and demonstration/celebration (iPERCED). Additionally, MSU hosts Tools of Engagement, an online learning platform to introduce community engagement to undergraduate students. The modules encourage students to reflect critically on the content, provide students with concrete examples that illustrate abstract concepts, and ask students to develop real-life scenarios. There are five modules in total, focusing on issues such as effective group work, successful partnerships, and negotiation techniques.

SUGGESTED WEBSITES AND ONLINE RESOURCES

WISE Project: The Writing Initiative for Service and Engagement
University of Colorado Boulder

Implementing Service-Learning in Higher Education
Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

A Checklist for Implementing Service-Learning in Higher Education
University of Hawaii Manoa

HANDOUT: WHAT IS SERVICE-LEARNING?

Service-learning has gained recognition as a curricular strategy for preparing students for their roles as professionals and citizens, changing the way faculty teach, changing the way higher education programs relate to their communities, enabling community organizations and community members to play significant roles in how students are educated, and enhancing community capacity (Connors, 2000).

SERVICE-LEARNING IS: a structured learning experience that combines community service with explicit learning objectives, preparation, and reflection. Students involved in service-learning are expected to provide direct community service and to learn about the context in which the service is provided, thus developing a connection between the service, their academic coursework, and their roles as citizens (Jacoby, 1996; Seifer, 1998).

SERVICE-LEARNING IS A FORM OF EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION THAT:
- is developed, implemented, and evaluated in collaboration with the community;
- responds to community-identified concerns;
- attempts to balance the service that is provided and the learning that takes place;
- enhances the curriculum by extending learning beyond the classroom and allowing students to apply what they've learned to real-world situations; and
- provides opportunities for critical reflection.

SERVICE-LEARNING IS SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT FROM OTHER FORMS OF EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION IN THAT IT:
- offers a balance between service and learning objectives;
- places an emphasis on reciprocal learning in lived experiences;
- increases an understanding of the content in which clinical and/or service work occurs;
- focuses on the development of civic skills;
- addresses community-identified concerns; and
- involves community in service-learning design and implementation.

CASE STUDY

The following case study, submitted by Debra Gibes, Humanities Faculty at Mott Community College, illustrates the creation of and internal supports needed for a service-learning course in developmental reading and writing sections.

The Inter-Generational Reading and Writing Project

Service-Learning Course Overview

The Inter-Generational Reading and Writing Project is a service-learning project at Mott Community College that brings together students enrolled in developmental reading courses and developmental writing courses with residents in assisted living facilities in nearby communities. The nature of the project involves reading students selecting stories with universal themes and designing discussion questions to help the community members comprehend the story and recall related memories. Each reading student is paired with a writing student to meet with one of the assisted living facility participants. During their visit, the reading students conduct the shared reading experience, followed by the writing students interviewing the participant to learn more about the memories evoked by the stories. Writing students then create personal narratives to capture the memories shared by the elderly. These narratives are compiled into a published anthology along with photos of the participants that were taken during the course of the project.

Funding & Partnership Development

Funding for the project was provided by two separate grants. The storybooks for the project were purchased using grant monies obtained the year before the project was launched through a campus organization that provides monies for student-focused activities. Another grant used to support innovative projects covered the cost of publishing the anthology. Each community participant as well as each assisted living facility was provided with a complimentary copy of the book. With assistance from the Office of Experiential Learning and the Center for Teaching and Learning at MCC, several assisted living and adult daycare facilities were identified as potential partners for this project. The partners that committed to collaborating in the project were two activities/program coordinators from two separate assisted living facilities. Each of these coordinators desired to provide opportunities for the elderly residents to share the rich personal accounts of their lives with others but memory loss, due to aging, made this difficult. Therefore, the outcomes intended through the project for the partners were to solicit the elderly in recalling their personal accounts by sharing vicarious stories that they could relate to and providing a written record of the oral histories that they were able to recall. The activities/program coordinators promoted the project amongst the residents and identified residents that had the interest and capacity to participate.

Course Outcomes

Three developmental reading or writing faculty members committed to engaging their students in this project. The faculty identified several student outcomes including campus-wide general education outcomes related to citizenship and critical thinking as well as specific course objectives. The outcomes for each developmental course focused on the application and relevancy of skills. Thirty-seven reading students and twenty-seven writing students participated and followed through in the project. Classroom instruction and guided practice were provided during class time to ensure the success of the outcomes. For example, reading students practiced reading and discussing their stories with each other and writing students engaged in the revision processes with one another for writing and publishing the memoirs. Some writing students also practiced writing their own personal memoirs to share with the elderly. Upon completion of the service

project, students were given surveys for identifying their response to various intrinsic outcomes and were asked to write reflective essays. Students expressed that the project helped them to learn and apply the skills taught in class. The students also expressed that they gained personal and social responsibility through collaboration and that the project heightened their awareness and interest in serving the community. As evidenced by the survey and reflective essays, the stated course outcomes were achieved.

Challenges

Working with developmental students toward accomplishing a service project can be difficult. Developmental students sometimes face personal challenges or other issues that prevent them from accomplishing a task. Therefore, several challenges did surface. Some reading students who were scheduled to share their stories withdrew or stopped coming to the class before they completed their service. In addition, some writing students who participated in interviewing the elderly did not write the required memoir. Some students did not have adequate skills for successful discussions and interviews, and therefore, some of the memoirs failed to meet expectations upon completion. Some of the content that was finished needed some revising to eliminate inaccuracies due to memory loss of the elderly participants. Each of these challenges was addressed as they occurred. Students, faculty, and partners all contributed extra effort to make sure that each elderly participant had a memoir published in the anthology. Despite the challenges, the goals of the project were successfully met.

The MCC campus partners and the community partners have expressed an interest in continued support of this service-learning project. The anthology represents a conjoined heritage as a community of life-long learners, and the key to its success was the community and campus partners who were committed to preserving those stories.