UNIT 7: DESIGNING COURSE EVALUATIONS AND IMPROVEMENT PLANS

"Great discoveries and achievements invariably involve the cooperation of many minds."
–Alexander Graham Bell

COMPETENCIES

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Identify the purposes of evaluation.
- Identify key course stakeholders and the critical information they need to know for decision-making.
- Write an evaluation plan for a service-learning course.
- Identify methods for measuring outcomes.
- Identify meaningful roles for students and community partners in the evaluation process.
- Document evaluation findings for effective dissemination.
- Use evaluation findings to improve the course.
- Enhance your understanding of student assessment plans presented in Unit 4.

WORKSHEET

- Designing Course Evaluations and Improvement Plans

INTRODUCTION

A critical component of service-learning is the development of course evaluation and improvement plans. Service-learning experiences provide exciting opportunities to evaluate and assess student learning outcomes, as well as to examine community, faculty, institutional, and partnership-related outcomes. Evaluation plans that are comprehensive and multi-tiered offer a full picture of the impact of service-learning courses and activities on the learner, the campus, and the community. The purpose of this unit is to present a strategy for conducting a comprehensive evaluation. It provides a blueprint for planning approaches to assess service-learning course outcomes on multiple stakeholders. Readers may also wish to review Unit 4 to enhance or refresh their understanding of student assessment, a core component of any overall course evaluation.

UNDERSTANDING EVALUATION

Michael Patton, an evaluation expert, defines evaluation as "the systematic collection of information about activities, characteristics and outcomes of programs, personnel and products to use to reduce uncertainties, improve effectiveness and make decisions." In a free association exercise, participants in a service-learning institute described evaluation as "paperwork," "grading," "taking stock," "statistics," "accountability," "reviewing negatives," "feedback," and "changing course." Essentially, evaluation is often viewed as something that people are interested in and want, but tend not to want to do. However, evaluation is something that all educators are already doing all of the time, even if their actions aren't explicitly defined as evaluation. Thus, it is critical to see evaluation in a new light, as a "consistent focused practice," that can be connected to the work that they do every day. Furthermore, evaluation should be seen as a means rather than an end—a means to learn, improve, and understand.

DESIGNING EVALUATION

Service-learning practitioners should engage in evaluation at the start of each program or class. One strategy is to initiate evaluation planning by taking the "blue sky" approach—that is, by asking what you would want to know if you could know absolutely everything about the students, the class, the partners, the community, and the clients. One approach to answering this question is to focus *internally,* and establish at the beginning what the target outcomes of the course are, what decisions will need to be made, and what information will be needed to make those decisions. Another approach is to focus more *externally* and to determine out of all the stakeholders that are involved or impacted by service-learning, who are the most important in terms of supporting and sustaining the service-learning program and what questions are most important to them. This requires decisions about whether funders, course directors, other faculty, university administration, community partners and their clients, local businesses, students in the course, other students, local institutions, the community at large, and other groups are the most critical *to the program* in terms of answering their questions and meeting their interests. For example, it could be helpful to ask if it is more important for other faculty to see service-learning as something that is worth their time and effort, or if it is more important for the university to feel that their reputation in the community has improved as a result of service-learning classes. Or, it could be helpful to ask if it is more important for students to develop a better understanding of how to motivate children to follow healthy diets, or if it is more important for the community partner to feel that they have been provided access to new resources. All of these issues are "important" and all of them speak to the issue of "sustainability" of service-learning programs. However, it is up to service-learning practitioners and partners to distill the *relative* importance of these stakeholders and their needs when designing evaluation plans, especially in regards to a key CCPH partnership principle that challenges service-learning practitioners to find ways to *share credit* with their partners for the accomplishments of the service-learning initiative.

When embarking upon evaluation design, it is vital to reflect the collaborative nature of service-learning and to avoid thinking of evaluation with only one mindset or only one framework. Evaluation should be sensitive to pluralist paradigms in terms socioeconomic status, ethnicity, lifestyle, life span, and so on. For example, in some cases, instead of measuring the number of hours a student has spent or the number of clients a student has interacted with, it's more important to understand the student's level of engagement and whether or not the student really understands the differences and cultural or ethnic backgrounds of the people the student is working with. To do this, it is critical to integrate feedback and data from multiple sources, including community partners, their clients, and others.

Lastly, an evaluation plan must be realistic and the data that is used must reliable and of high quality, however that is defined. The process of prioritizing stakeholders and information needs must be supplemented by an assessment as to what can realistically be collected and analyzed, given budgetary and organizational constraints. Furthermore, while informal conversations with partners may provide invaluable insights on how to refine service-learning courses, some stakeholders may only consider hard numbers (vs. anecdotal evidence) when judging the success of service-learning. There is a need to decipher, once information needs are defined, whether that information should be collected in-house or by a third party, and in qualitative or quantitative form. Then, the methods of data collection need to be decided upon, whether they are interviews, focus groups, online surveys, written questionnaires, and so on weighing the potential for each method to yield high-quality data.

As a means to maximize available resources, service-learning practitioners are encouraged to consider whether or not the information gathered has to be primary in nature, or whether secondary sources of research and existing data can be leveraged in the evaluation process. Service-learning practitioners are also encouraged to reach out to colleagues to see if resources such as questionnaires or survey forms that were previously created could be refined or reused for their purposes. As much as possible, it is suggested to use data that is already being collected within the course of the program and to view evaluation as just "good information management."

CLOSING THE LOOP

It is essential to think realistically from the very beginning to determine if the data being collected would actually be *used* and incorporated into curriculum and program design. Even if stakeholders are interested in the information, if practitioners are not dedicated to *reflecting* on evaluation results and integrating those lessons and insights into their program, then that data collection will simply not be a worthwhile use of resources. Service-learning practitioners need to "close the loop" for assessment—otherwise, evaluation just becomes useless and expensive data gathering.

Service-learning practitioners are advised to be on the lookout for any *"unintended consequences"* of the program that might emerge during evaluation processes. Sometimes, the most significant impact of a service-learning program may not have even been planned or expected. For example, consider the unintended positive results of bringing pharmacy students into a local school whose student population tended not to have potential role models come into their lives very often. In this example, strong bonds formed between the pharmacy students and the children and the positive benefits of these children being exposed to new role models was one that was not highlighted in the evaluation planning process. Thus, the message here is that while rigorous evaluation planning is important, it is also important to be open and flexible as to noticing and analyzing unexpected results of a program, whether positive or negative.

Lastly, evaluation should be seen as inextricably linked to program sustainability. Focused evaluation can keep a program in "continuous program improvement mode." In other words, continuous quality improvement is "part and parcel" to sustainability.

Key Takeaways:

1. Evaluation is just good information management and should be embraced and planned for from the beginning.
2. If service-learning practitioners do not "close the loop" with assessment and integrate findings into program and course design, then the evaluation data is not worth the time it takes to collect.
3. Focused evaluation is linked to continuous quality improvement and thus sustainability.

Why do an assessment of a service-learning course?

Evaluation is key to the sustainability of service-learning. It clarifies priorities, enhances accountability and impacts accreditation. It also conveys results to stakeholders and the public, supporting the case for additional funding, expansion, growth and possible redirection. Assessment helps identify any changes that should be made, and motivates participants by documenting progress and gains.

Think 'early and often' when planning for assessment. Effective assessment is not an afterthought – it's an integral part of the entire process of partnership. It does cost money, and it may even be a significant part of the budget, but it's absolutely essential to the ongoing success of the partnership. Keep in mind that assessment doesn't necessarily have to be a scientific evaluation conducted at the conclusion of a project: it's more beneficial in some cases to take the 'weekly quiz' approach instead of focusing on the 'final exam' to gauge progress.

Strategies and methods for measuring outcomes

1. In developing plans for assessment, it's important to set realistic goals. Clarify each partner's objectives, and be clear and realistic about commitments of time, personnel and money. Try to work through any potential misunderstandings or differences early on and clearly state who is responsible for what. Remember that partnership is a 'gain/gain' proposition; by identifying and focusing on the mutual goals of the community and institution, both sides stand to gain something.

2. Don't overlook process evaluation. Incorporate into the assessment an evaluation of how you're conceptualizing, planning, implementing and operating. This can lead to process improvements that ultimately affect the project's outcomes.

3. In order to establish credibility and objectivity, designate an evaluator who isn't directly involved in the partnership, though it helps if the person or team is associated with the institution side of the partnership. Credibility is an important factor when presenting and working with potential funders.

4. Only pursue assessment if you're going to do something with the results.

Following is a helpful set of questions that, when answered with detailed specifics, may assist you in preparing for effective assessment.

Outcome Sought	University or College	Community
Who		
What		
Where		
When		
Why		
How long		
How much $$$		
Funding source		
Potential Next Steps		

Then ask yourself these questions. Remember to be specific.

- How will I know if this partnership has achieved my goals and my partner's goals?
- Has this program made a difference in the community?
- Have the students learned something? What?
- How could I do it better next time?
- What are the next logical steps?

TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED

How will you know when the service-learning course has positively contributed to student learning and benefited the community? How will the evaluation findings contribute to continuous improvement of the service-learning course? These tips offer a general but comprehensive overview of learner assessment, course assessment and course impact in community settings.

Ask the question: Whom should the evaluation serve? Before jumping into the development of an evaluation plan, it is important to articulate the purpose of the evaluation, and to whom the evaluation should serve. Is the evaluation meant to satisfy the funding source of your efforts, or is the evaluation meant to satisfy a different entity, such as the academic institution or community agency involved? You answer(s) may imply very different incentives, processes and rewards.

Ask the question: Who are the stakeholders involved in the evaluation and what will they want to know? Make a list of the different stakeholders and determine through an identified process, the key issues they would like to see as a result of the evaluation. Consider using mixed methods (e.g., qualitative and quantitative) since some stakeholders will find stories more compelling and others will find "hard data" more compelling.

Determine the priority areas of the evaluation. It is very easy to over commit to the process of evaluation. Early in the process, it is important to prioritize the most important issues that you wish to evaluate both short and long term. In this way, you are able to remain focused on maintaining the program, while also conducting an important evaluation. Striking this balance is important to the long term success.

Identify important logistics and appropriate policies for conducting the evaluation. As part of the evaluation, it is important to analyze logistical issues, including certain policies or procedures that will be necessary for conducting the evaluation. Does the evaluation or related research need approval by the Institutional Review Board or a Community Review Board (you may need to determine if an agency like this exists in the community) before moving forward? What is the timeline for related approvals? **Addressing these questions is critical**; poor follow-up on evaluation protocol can jeopardize trust between partners and, more importantly, potentially compromise participants involved in the evaluation.

Determine the costs of the evaluation. How will the evaluation be supported? What resources are available? Who will conduct the evaluation? When possible, it is important to create an evaluation budget before evaluation plans are implemented. Suggestions for sources of funding are outlined in Units 8 and 9

Develop a system of building continuous improvement into the evaluation plan. There are several techniques you can use to continuously improve the course from the perspectives of students, faculty, and community partners. For example, you may wish to: 1) hold regular reflection and feedback sessions with all course participants; 2) ask all course participants to complete an anonymous survey asking them what worked, what didn't work, what they would change and how; 3) host regular meetings to identify issues and encourage group problem-solving; 4) provide a course "suggestion box" to encourage course participants to share their ideas for course improvement; and/or 5) ask recipients of service how they benefited from the student's efforts (i.e., satisfaction surveys). Information related to constructive feedback techniques can be found in Unit 4.

Collect relevant information for your evaluation early. It is important to collect relevant information early in the evaluation process. This could include stories and anecdotes that are shared by students, faculty, or community leaders, and evaluation findings and tested surveys implemented for service-learning courses. Having this information early on will support course planning, implementation and improvement.

Review the evidence base on service-learning outcomes. When evaluating a service-learning course, it is important to stay informed about the latest service-learning research and evaluation methods and findings. There is no reason to reinvent the wheel in developing assessment instruments, for example.

Capitalize on existing opportunities to collect evaluation data. Draw upon existing data sources such as course evaluations, alumni surveys, and required first year student orientations (i.e., a questionnaire can be distributed at the orientation to obtain baseline information on attitudes).

Identify ways to involve community partners at all levels of the evaluation and assessment plans. It is important to draw from the perspectives of community members and partners throughout the evaluation process. In fact, there should be maximum community involvement at all levels of the evaluation and assessment plans, if possible. Community members can shape the design of the evaluation and also inform desirable outcomes for the community. In addition, community perspectives are essential towards understanding student effectiveness in the community. Feedback from community partners concerning student (and faculty) effectiveness in the community can occur through formal or informal methods. Additional information related to community role and involvement in student assessment is discussed in Unit 4.

Develop realistic goals and outcomes that are meaningful to stakeholders. Goals and outcomes should be realistic, measurable and relevant to key stakeholders. It is important to understand that there are other variables, in addition to the actual service activity, that affect change. Avoid over-emphasizing the role of the service activity in creating change. If students are involved in a semester course, how much change can realistically take place in this time frame? Consider developing short term and long term goals to safeguard against over-ambitious expectations of the course and activities. Unit 4 provides information on establishing student objectives and outcomes that may be helpful.

Establish the course goals. One of the first steps in developing an evaluation plan includes determining the course goals and objectives. In other words, what is the course trying to achieve? If your goals have already been developed, you may wish to review or refine them before moving forward. Goals are the ultimate results of the project, sometimes unreachable in the short-term. They are usually written in broad-based statements which outline the results of changes being undertaken. An example of a course goal is:

> *To equip undergraduate students with an understanding of the democratic process and civic roles and responsibilities while contributing to solving community-identified problems.*

Establish the course objectives. The course objectives – both qualitative and quantitative – should be derived from your goals; they should directly reflect the desired impacts. The objectives should state the outcomes to which you will be held accountable. Depending upon the nature of the evaluation, you may consider developing process or outcome objectives. Process objectives address the process of operating a program and how work will be accomplished to produce a specific outcome. Examples of process objective are:

> *To host weekly tutoring sessions for elementary school students.*
>
> *To sponsor ten parent education classes with an average of twenty attendees each during the semester.*

Outcome objectives focus on the end products of a program, although a spectrum of outcomes may exist during the course of a program. Setting the "how big" component of an objective requires careful consideration and expert knowledge in the area of service being provided. An example of an outcome objective is:

> *To improve the oral communication skills of 50 undergraduate students as measured by self-ratings and ratings by elementary school teachers and students,, to be administered before and after participation in the course.*

The objectives should focus on each of the impact areas of the course, using both outcome and process objectives to the greatest extent possible. Courses may need to focus on process elements exclusively when they are important to achieving an outcome goal that cannot be assessed in the short term (i.e., one year). For example, if a program or course seeks to reduce truancy among youth, then an intermediate outcome measure might be how effectively the service-learning course is implemented or the impact of course activities on the youth's self-efficacy. Unit 4 provides more in-depth information concerning the establishment of course objectives. You may wish to review this section.

Determine what change should occur as a result of a program's efforts. As part of the evaluation plan, partnership members must determine the scope of change that will result from the course's efforts. For example, each objective should be written with the following components in mind, and in the context of larger societal issues or need:

- The product or service that will be provided;
- The intended result due to the service provided;
- A method of measuring the quality or impact of the work;
- A standard of success the course hopes to meet; and
- The number of individuals who benefit.

As mentioned earlier in this unit, it is important to avoid over-estimating the expected change as a result of the service being provided during the course.

Link objectives directly to the activities of the course. Consider your objectives carefully to determine whether you have set objectives that will give the course an opportunity to demonstrate success. Objectives that are set too broadly, too narrowly, or off topic will hamper your efforts to show results. A proposed course may aim to accomplish many things, but it is important to distinguish between objectives that provide data that are "nice to know" and objectives that result in data that you "need to know." For example, imagine that students that are serving in an immunization outreach program are involved in distributing brochures about the program. Although the program staff may be interested in knowing how many brochures are distributed and what proportion are read, this is not an essential piece of information and is not an ideal program objective. A more critical objective might address the proportion of people being immunized who report having received the brochure and the proportion who report attending the clinic because of the brochure they received.

Establish community impact. Objectives related to community impact indicate positive changes expected in the community as a result of the service component of the course. The outcomes described in the objectives must reflect not simply inputs or processes (i.e., students provided 100 hours of mentoring), but more importantly, actual improvements in the problem identified by the program (i.e., improved knowledge). The following example highlights how this may be accomplished. (This example assumes that a baseline has been established).

Course Goal: Reduce physical fighting among adolescents.

> *Community Objective: to reduce incidents of violence during the school year by 50 percent through a conflict resolution training to 200 high school students.*

- The activity to be engaged in is conflict resolution trainings.
- The intended result is an increase in student understanding of conflict resolution techniques and a decrease in the incidents of violence during school.
- The method of measure is pre-post surveys of students and teachers.
- The standard of success is 70 percent of students reporting increased knowledge and teachers reporting an average of 50 percent reduction of the incidents of violence during school.
- High school students and 6 teachers will benefit.

Establish student impact. The objectives related to student impact should indicate changes in student growth and development, attitudes, knowledge and/or behavior as a result of involvement in the course. Unit 4 describes measuring student outcomes related to identified course competencies or tasks.

Student Learning Objective: To increase undergraduate students' understanding of the barriers that homeless individuals face in obtaining housing and social services, and of available community resources.

- The activity is interviewing homeless individuals about their experiences and the community resources they have found helpful, and to compile those resources into a flyer to distribute at the city's homeless shelters.
- The intended result is improved student understanding of the barriers that homeless individuals face in obtaining housing and social services, and of available community resources.
- The method of measure of quality or impact is an essay describing what they learned and recommendations for needed services.
- The standard of success is satisfactory analysis of the policy issues;
- 30 students will benefit.

Establish institutional impact. Objectives related to the institutional impact should indicate the ways in which the program will affect an institution as a whole. They may articulate how service-learning teaching methodologies will be institutionalized; specify expected changes in institutional policies and the practices of faculty and administrators; or state outcomes related to the number, quality or sustainability of the institution's community involvement.

Institutional Objective: To create faculty development opportunities that result in service-learning courses being offered in multiple courses required for the engineering major.

- The activity to be engaged in is faculty development workshops.
- The intended results are an increased knowledge of service-learning, how it can achieve core engineering competencies, and how it can be incorporated into engineering courses.
- The method of measure includes documentation of changes in course content/format, syllabi content analysis, pre- and post- test surveys of knowledge changes.
- The standards of success are 90 percent of engineering faculty reporting increased knowledge and 50 percent reporting intention to incorporate community service into their courses.
- Six engineering faculty members and about 60 students will benefit.

Consider hiring an external evaluator if possible or necessary. The question of hiring an external evaluator to conduct the evaluation is a common one. There are several advantages to having an external evaluation conducted. For example, the priorities of program staff can better focus on the development and implementation of the program. It does not have to be costly to hire an external evaluator; in fact, you may wish to hire a graduate student who is studying program evaluation in a different department to work with the project as part of a doctoral dissertation or part-time job. In some cases, however, it may not be necessary to hire an external evaluator. Most service-learning courses do not usually have an external evaluator.

Determine the utilization of evaluation results. Early in the course of the evaluation activities, it is important to determine the utility of the evaluation results. The value of conducting an evaluation is different and unique for everyone. Will findings be used to make feasible changes in things that can be changed, such as improvements for the course? Do the findings challenge current philosophy or practice? Do they offer new perspectives? (Rossi and Freeman, 1993). Partners may wish to discuss the evaluation findings and how they can be used to change or improve the course the next time around.

Design a dissemination plan and disseminate the evaluation findings. The evaluation findings can help overcome course weaknesses, highlight successes and gain greater institutional and community support for the course. It is helpful to consider the potential audiences for the evaluation findings, including deans, curriculum committee members, course directors, funding agencies, students, and community partners. Evaluation findings can be communicated and disseminated in a variety of written and oral forms, including: attending and presenting at meetings and workshops; submitting articles to peer-reviewed journals; posting information about the evaluation on a website or electronic listserv, local community boards and newspapers; or presentations at local community meetings. Scheduling meetings with Deans, the school's development director or editor of the campus newspaper can be additional strategies for disseminating evaluation findings.

Consider opportunities for scholarship. Campus and community educators may consider ways that evaluation products, such as validated tools and findings can be turned into scholarly products. Refer to the websites and resources listed in the final unit within this curriculum for detailed information on opportunities to publish and present engaged scholarship.

Share credit and celebrate! After accomplishing a milestone, it is important to celebrate your success and recognize the contributions of program partners. This can be accomplished through community and institutional recognition events and sharing successes through news articles or other public forums.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- When you think of the terms, "evaluation" and "continuous improvement," what comes to mind?
- What concerns do you have about conducting an evaluation of your service-learning course?
- What resources do you need to conduct the evaluation; how will you and your partners go about obtaining those resources?
- What products could be developed and disseminated based on the evaluation?

CASE STUDIES

The following case studies focus on key themes related to the process of establishing and assessing learning outcomes.

THE FOLLOWING CASE STUDY WAS SUBMITTED THROUGH SAGINAW VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY:

Overview

The 2014 students from Saginaw Valley State University (SVSU), in partnership with the Health and Human Services Council (HHSC) of Midland County, created and implemented a health survey to help inform health concerns in the county, address equity in access and preventative care, and create common "themes" based on data to help address countywide health issues and perceptions. The primary purpose of the research was to evaluate health behaviors and perceptions by community members of services and programs offered within the county. In addition, the purpose of this project was to develop a meaningful service-learning experience for students from Saginaw Valley State University.

Project Collaboration

During this project, students from the Health Science and Exercise Science programs were actively engaged in all aspects of the project. Their participation included the development of the survey instrument, recruitment of study participants at locations across Midland County, data analysis, the preparation of the final report, and dissemination of the findings of the study. Throughout this project, faculty held bi-weekly meeting with the student group to reflect on their experiences engaging the residents in Midland County and participating in the various aspects of the research process. The SVSU research team included five faculty from the College of Education, College of Health and Human Services, and the College of Business and Management and 15 students from disciplines within Health and Human Services. The team collected data from a representative sample across Midland County. Data collection occurred via online and paper surveys. Site-specific locations for data collection were determined in collaboration with the Health and Human Services Council (HHSC) of Midland County to maximize access for researchers to reach the target population. In order to reach all Midland County residents, the team used community centers, libraries, schools, churches, family centers, health care agencies, and local events to gather face-to-face surveys and/or promote the online survey.

Student Participation

The SVSU students were involved in all aspects of this process. The team used exiting US Census, state, and local data to ensure that the sample of ~500 was representative of all segments of the Midland County population and would generate quality data in rural areas and within the out-county population. In addition to the existing CDC and MDCH questions, the SVSU Team worked with HHSC to add questions that address preventative health and perceptions of quality of services in Midland County. Additionally, the SVSU Team paid close attention to subpopulations within the County including women of childbearing age, out-county residents, seniors, MI Health Plan participants, low-income residents, and any other subpopulation deemed necessary. Special focus was placed on the impact of poverty and its relation to health, which is important in addressing the growing poverty in Midland.

Impact

Through the partnership with HHSC, the community-engaged approach to the project, and the intentionality around sharing results with HHSC and county residents, SVSU students experienced a unique and rich perspective of the health concerns within the community. The final report includes student perceptions of their service-learning experience, student reflections, along with in-depth community impact data. Based on the 2014 report submitted by SVSU students and faculty, the Health and Human Services Council is initiating a Community Health Improvement Plan focusing on three key priority areas: later in life quality, substance abuse/tobacco, and obesity/inactivity. This project is highlighted on the Midland County Dashboard.

PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT AND FEEDBACK

The following case study has been adapted from Partners in Health Education: Service-Learning by First Year Medical Students in *Creating Community Responsive Physicians: Concepts and Models for Service-Learning in Medical Education* (available: http://www.ccph.info).

Program overview

First year students at Dartmouth Medical School may elect to teach health at K-8 schools in the Dartmouth and Upper Connecticut River Valley region through the Partners in Health Education Course. This elective is offered twice each year, during the fall and winter terms of the medical school Year One curriculum. Students teach a minimum of five lessons to a single class of children in a public elementary school and participate in three seminars that feature teaching and classroom management techniques, peer collaboration and structured reflection…credit is awarded for successful completion of the course's activities.

Program improvement and feedback

Across its evolution, Partners in Health Education has existed in three distinctive formats, involving seven groups of medical students in more than 100 medical student-teacher pairs. The elective course described here resulted from participatory feedback and program responsiveness. Faculty, student leaders, teachers and evaluators all constantly gather information and feedback on the program and apply them to the course in progress, the upcoming course, and longer-range planning for the program. The processes that are used to gather feedback include:

- Two contacts per term between teacher-trainers and the program coordinator providing information on student performance in schools.
- Biweekly meetings of student leaders and the program coordinator on scheduling, seminar planning, teacher contacts, and medical student support.
- End of term oral and written feedback by medical students.
- An annual program evaluation by interested teachers.
- Course faculty meetings before each term and before each seminar.
- Ubiquitous access to and use of electronic mail by students and faculty.
- An annual program planning process that includes school representatives, student representatives, program faculty and administrators.
- Participation of program faculty in professional conferences and meetings on service-learning, participation of student leaders in local and national organizations on community service by medical students, participation of faculty in professional conferences and medical education improvement efforts, participation of evaluators in conferences and meetings.

Input from all of these external and internal sources is shared in regular team meetings and through program implementation contact.

The Partners in Health Education team is dedicated to the continuous improvement of the program so that it provides maximum benefit to participating medical students, teachers, children, institutions and communities.

Case Study Questions:

- In this case study, how might the children provide feedback to the medical students? How might other members of the community provide their input?
- What will be your process for soliciting feedback and improvement as part of the evaluation plan? What do you need in place for this to happen?
- How will your evaluation findings be used and disseminated?

EVALUATING COMMUNITY IMPACT THROUGH A COMMUNITY-BASED PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

The following case study has been adapted with permission from Janet Hamada, Development Director, Westside Health Authority.

"A partnership between the Westside Health Authority, West Suburban Medical Center (WSMC), West Suburban College of Nursing, Loyola University Chicago and other organizations was funded by the US Department of Commerce and WSMC to develop and implement a community-based initiative called Every Block A Village Online. The initiative was designed to provide residents of Chicago's Austin community with the skills and equipment needed to access Internet health and safety resources and address community concerns. Several goals were targeted by this initiative. Among them were aims to improve health, increase safety, and enhance the quality of neighborhood life by: 1) reducing the proportion of low birth weight infants born in the area; 2) reducing area emergency department visits through increased access to primary care and 3) introducing Citizen Leaders (CLs) to technology to be used as a tool for improving their communities. (Citizen Leaders were recruited from each block in Beat 1524 and asked for a commitment for service to their neighbors and provided with a WebTV unit and printer. They were trained in community processes and Internet skills and were contacted weekly to support their use of the new communication medium.) Health professional students have been involved in the initiative playing a variety of roles.

The project team used a participatory action research approach to evaluation [Participatory research is a partnership approach to research that equitably involves, for example, community members, organizational representatives, and researchers in all aspects of the research process; with all partners contributing their expertise and sharing responsibility and ownership to enhance understanding of a given phenomenon, and to integrate the knowledge gained with action to improve the health and well-being of community members (Israel, B., 2000)]. Information and data were gathered throughout the three years of funding and used to improve and shape the initiative to the needs of the community. The team tracked outcome data such as birth weight and use of emergency visits but also some process data on the daily impact of WebTV on the lives of Citizen Leaders. The team stayed in close contact with the CLs through meetings, focus groups, and telephone follow-ups to document uses of WebTV and stories. Some of the results suggest that the percent of low birth weight increased in a comparison community while the percent of low birth weight decreased in the target community. Data on the use of emergency room as a source of primary care are not sufficient to evaluate at this time. Follow-up data will be available later.

The process information collected provides valuable information on the impact of technology in the lives of community residents. Success stories and interesting anecdotes were recorded in ongoing fashion. Many community residents reported success in obtaining health, safety, and employment information both at home and at the Network Training Site. The project team has collected 450 success stories in a period of three years. These stories are listed on the home page (www.ebvonline.org) and are testimony to the improved quality of life experienced by CLs. In 17 percent of the reported stories, WebTV was used as a tool to take action to address a community or personal concern. Overall, over 50 percent of the web stories embraced issues related to a broad and holistic definition of health, including safe and clean environments, employment, and general quality of life."

Case Study Questions:

- In this case study, a participatory action research approach was followed to conduct the evaluation. How do you propose to conduct your evaluation? In what ways will it be similar to a participatory action research approach?
- How will you measure community impact in the evaluation of your service-learning course?
- What will be the process for collecting stories and anecdotal information for the evaluation?

CHECKLIST FOR THIS UNIT

The following checklist list provides key components or "action" items for developing your evaluation plan for your service-learning course. Have you:

- ❑ Identified important logistics and appropriate policies for conducting the evaluation?
- ❑ Determined the costs and timeline of the evaluation?
- ❑ Determined whom among the stakeholders the evaluation should serve?
- ❑ Developed a system of building continuous improvement plans into the evaluation?
- ❑ Considered ways to involve community partners at all levels of the evaluation?
- ❑ Determined the priority areas of the evaluation?
- ❑ Collected relevant information for the evaluation early in the process?
- ❑ Developed realistic goals and outcomes that are meaningful to the stakeholders?
- ❑ Determined what change should occur as a result of the course and program's efforts?
- ❑ Established community, participant, and institutional impact?
- ❑ Considered hiring an external evaluator if possible or necessary?
- ❑ Determined how the evaluation results will be used?
- ❑ Determined how and in what form(s) the evaluation findings will disseminated?
- ❑ Shared credit and celebrated your success?

SUGGESTED WEBSITES AND ONLINE RESOURCES

American Evaluation Association
ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation
Resources for Methods in Evaluation and Social Research

SUGGESTED TOOLS AND WORKBOOKS

Gelmon, S. B., Holland, B. A., Driscoll, A., Spring, A., & Kerrigan, S. (2001). *Assessing service-learning and civic engagement: principles and techniques.* Rhode Island: Campus Compact.

Shinnamon, A., Gelmon, S., Holland, B. (1999). *Methods and strategies for assessing service-learning in the health professions*. San Francisco, CA: Community-Campus Partnerships for Health. Available at: www.ccph.info

SUGGESTED READINGS

Eyler, J., Giles, D. (1999). *Where's the learning in service-learning?* Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.
Fetterman, D., Kaftarian, S., & Wandersman, A. (Eds). (1996). *Empowerment evaluation: Knowledge and tools for self-assessment and accountability.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Gelmon, S., Holland, B., & Shinnamon, A. (1998). *Health professions schools in service to the nation: Final evaluation report*. San Francisco, CA: Community-Campus Partnerships for Health.

Ramsey, A., Mendoza, A., & Weil, J. (2014). Using experiential and collaborative methods with undergraduates and older persons as part of an introduction to gerontology course. *PRISM: A Journal of Regional Engagement*, 3(1). Retrieved from http://encompass.eku.edu/prism/vol3/iss1/1

Shinnamon, A., Gelmon, S., Holland, B. (1999). *Methods and strategies for assessing service-learning in the health professions.* San Francisco, CA: Community-Campus Partnerships for Health. Available at: www.ccph.info

Vernon, D.T., & Blake, R.L. (1993). Does problem-based learning work? A meta-analysis of evaluative research. *Academic Medicine*, 68: 550-563.

Ward K. (1996). Service-learning: A faculty guide to assessing student learning. *Learn and Serve Link*; 2(1)1-6.

WORKSHEET: DESIGNING COURSE EVALUATIONS & IMPROVEMENT PLANS

The completion of this worksheet will assist in the development of an evaluation and continuous improvement plan. Space is provided to document your responses.

Questions	Response	Notes
What are the program or course goals?		
What important logistics and policies must be addressed before conducting the evaluation?		
What are the costs of the evaluation?		
What is the evaluation timeline?		
How will the evaluation be supported?		
Whom should the evaluation serve?		
Who will conduct the evaluation? (i.e., an external evaluator? An evaluator from a different department?)		
Who is involved in the evaluation and what are their responsibilities?		
What methods of continuous improvement will you utilize to improve your course and activities?		
What role will community members and representatives play in the evaluation?		
What are the priority areas of the evaluation?		
What are the program or course objectives?	Outcome objectives: 1. 2. 3 Process objectives: 1. 2. 3.	

Questions	Response	Notes
What change should occur as a result of the program's efforts?		
Are the objectives directly linked to the activities of the program? If so, how?		
What data sources are available to you that might assist in evaluation implementation?		
What are the community impacts?		
What are student or participant impacts?		
What are institutional impacts?		
What are your plans for evaluation dissemination?		
How will the evaluation results be utilized? (i.e. improve course and activities?)		
Other questions: 1. 2.		