

UNIT 8: BUILDING SERVICE-LEARNING COURSE INFRASTRUCTURE

“Due to the demands of heavy course loads and part-time jobs, many students do not venture far from their local neighborhoods or the university district. Participation... may require taking a new bus route to the inner city or an unfamiliar neighborhood. It requires learning about local organizations, their structures, and their funding, and meeting and interviewing staff members and directors.”

–Lucy Jarosz and Kim Johnson-Bogart in New Concepts of the Relationship Between College and Community: The Potential of Service-Learning

COMPETENCIES

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Identify useful institutional and community resources necessary for developing and implementing service-learning courses.
- Create a “plan of action” for developing and implementing service-learning courses.
- Identify meaningful roles for students, community partners, and faculty in the process of building service-learning course infrastructure.
- Prepare for sustaining the service-learning course (discussed in Unit 9).

INTRODUCTION

Faculty involved in service-learning are often surprised by the time, detail, and complexity involved in designing courses and activities in community settings. This unit presents useful information about the necessary resources and materials that must be in place for effective development and implementation of service-learning courses. Information discussed in this unit addresses strategies for building course infrastructure that benefits faculty, community partners and students.

TIPS

The development of a service-learning course is multi-faceted and occurs at both internal and external layers of the institution (Kern, D., et al.). The following tips present strategies for building course and program activities on both levels.

Internal support systems for service-learning course development

Identify the institutional policies and procedures you must follow to develop a service-learning course. Each institution is unique and has its own set of institutional policies and procedures that must be followed to develop a service-learning course. Several of the more common policies and procedures are listed below for your reference. Those that are unique to your institutional culture may be missing and should be identified. As you develop the course, it is important to consider how much time you will need to review and implement these procedures.

Determine whether your course will need curriculum committee approval. Once you have developed the course, you will determine whether it needs curriculum committee approval. It is important to determine the length of the approval process, particularly whether you will have enough time for the process to conclude before the course is scheduled to begin.

Determine whether your course and/or the community service activities undertaken by students in the course will need approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Depending upon the nature of the service-learning activities, it is important to determine whether IRB approval will be needed. It is important, again, to determine the length of the approval process before the course is scheduled to begin.

Determine the liability and risk management issues that need to be addressed before the course can be offered. As discussed in Unit 3, it is critical to identify the liability and risk management issues, such as safety issues, liability insurance, and written agreements or memorandums with partners. Refer to the resources listed in Unit 3 for more information.

Seek and establish support for the course by deans, department leaders, faculty, students, and community partners. In an effort to build support among key constituents, consider the following questions which will be important to answer: What are the benefits of the course to the institution and community? What are the risks to the institution and community? What are the steps that will be taken to gain support of and involve these different groups of people? What colleagues or partners will be helpful in galvanizing support for the course? What resources are needed to foster this support? What evidence exists to support connections between service-learning and strategic priorities or issues facing the school, university and discipline/profession?

Determine course staffing needs. Key questions to consider include: Who will be responsible for coordinating activities involved in the course? How will students be matched with community partners? How many students will be working with a given community partner? How many community partners are involved in the course? Is a service-learning coordinator necessary? How might a student teaching assistant or community partner play necessary roles to “staff” certain course activities?

Seek out internal resources that can be used to support the service-learning course. For example, is there a campus center for service-learning that may be able to assist with identifying community partners, conducting community partner site visits or administering student evaluations? In the health professions, many states have Area Health Education Centers that provide similar sorts of assistance. Are funds available to support a student teaching assistant? Resources may come in the form of funds for teaching assistants, new course development, purchasing of books and other media, faculty development workshops, and attendance at conferences and meetings. Possible sources of campus funding include faculty development offices, community service offices, or special awards programs.

Determine whether student associations or other groups on campus could be a resource to the service-learning course. For example, student associations could help with student recruitment by “getting the word” out to students about service-learning opportunities. Many student associations are engaged in community service projects that could become connected to a service-learning course for academic credit.

Design and implement a “marketing plan” for the service-learning course. The institution’s public relations office and the office that produces course listings may be helpful in marketing the course. Incorporating information about the course into student orientation, student organization meetings and mailings to incoming students are additional marketing strategies to consider. Work with community partners and students to determine those available resources on campus that can convey information about the course.

Identify campus space for meetings and course planning. You may wish to alternate your meetings between campus and a community partner organization or community site; in either case, you will need a reliable meeting space for course planning and evaluation.

Identify other logistical issues, including travel to community partner sites. It is important to consider logistical issues related to student travel to community partner sites. If the community partners are within walking distance of the campus, then this may not be a critical issue. However, if the community partners are located at a distance from campus, you will need to determine how students will be transported to the sites. Is there a campus shuttle available? Will they transport themselves by car or public transportation? Will they be reimbursed for their travel? If the course involves spending an extended period in a rural community, for example, will housing be provided or will there be help available to make housing arrangements? Please refer to the sample student service-learning agreement handout found in Unit 3 that provides useful travel tips for students.

Schedule orientation meetings prior to the start of the service component of the course. Prior to the introduction of the course activities in the community, it is critical to schedule a meaningful orientation with students, faculty, and community partners. This is an opportunity to provide an orientation and review for all stakeholders of the goals of the course, the scope of activities, roles and responsibilities, community context, and the mission/history/activities of the community partner(s). Consider scheduling a series of orientation meetings, or an orientation that consists of one full or half-day long session.

Familiarize yourself with your institution's review, promotion and tenure guidelines. Will your school and university's review, promotion and tenure guidelines support or hinder your involvement in service-learning? [The Clearinghouse for the Scholarship of Engagement](#) provides key resources for advancing faculty scholarship in service-learning. In addition, the [CCPH website](#) provides additional resources in this area. Finally, an in-depth list of suggested websites and readings section is provided in Unit 10 for additional information on faculty scholarship.

External support systems for service-learning course development

Build the support and interest of community leaders in the area. If the service-learning course and community partnerships are new, then it is critical that interest and support in the course are generated among community leaders. There are several strategies to inform the local community about the service-learning course, including attending town forums, meetings, and events, describing the community service that students will be providing through community bulletin boards, radio, and neighborhood newspapers.

Determine what community resources will contribute to the course activities. In many cases, community agencies are able to contribute direct or indirect sources of support for service-learning activities. Examples of this may include release time for staff to supervise students, dedicated space for seminar and reflective discussions and access to speakers from the community. Unit 1 provides information about resource sharing and how this might be documented in a partnership agreement or memorandum.

Identify a community review board. In some communities, there are groups that protect the interests of members of the community from intrusive or potentially exploitative research activities. If your service-learning course will have a community-based research component, it is important to identify and meet with the local community review board to determine the necessary processes before conducting any research in the community.

Support, reward and recognize community partners. It is important to identify resources that will maximize the involvement of community partners in the service-learning course. Community partners are often volunteers and it is important to provide meaningful support and acknowledgment to sustain their involvement. For example, will community partners have access to parking, electronic mail, computers, library and other campus resources? Will community partners be compensated for their time and experience? Will they be provided a faculty title of adjunct or assistant professor? Will community partner organizations receive monetary payment?

Potential challenges that service-learning practitioners face in satisfying and thus retaining community partners concern 1) finding rewards that contribute to desired outcomes, and 2) lack of efficient coordination and communication with campus partners. Recommendations for overcoming these challenges include:

- Know your community and understand its special strengths and deficiencies; ask community leaders for a guided tour.
- Make efforts to appreciate the limitations, needs, abilities and expectations of community partners but also the value and expertise the community partners can provide.
- Regularly nurture relationships with community partners – be present, be active, be available, be consistent.
- Communicate the level of student readiness and the expectation as to amount of training and supervision that students will need.
- Survey community partners regarding desired rewards. Some suggestions were to provide:
 - Access to university computer networks, databases, libraries and other resources helpful in grant writing
 - Authorship credit, adjunct (non-paid) faculty titles, letters of acknowledgment or praise from university deans or presidents or other mechanisms that can add weight to future grant proposals
 - Regular “recognition” events



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What internal and/or external barriers do you anticipate as you plan and implement your service-learning course? How do you propose to address the barriers?
- What most excites you about the planning of your service-learning course? What can you do to maintain this passion for yourself?
- What elements of the service-learning course most excite your community partners?

CASE STUDIES



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

¡JUNTOS TODOS APRENDEMOS!

This service-learning example was adapted from the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll records for "Youth Leadership" by Learn and Serve America Summer 2007 intern, Robyn Snelling.

At Central University in Iowa, faculty members have access to a wide range of resources for developing and supporting their service-learning classes. The Program for Learning Awareness of Cultures in Experiential Settings (PLACES) develops and sustains quality partnerships with approximately 40 community agencies and grassroots organizations throughout Central Iowa. As well as providing a network of community partners, the campus provides faculty with help from the Advocates for Community Engagement (ACEs), student workers who assist in the coordination of service-learning. Additionally, the campus uses its annual service day as a tool for supporting and sustaining service-learning courses by giving all students exposure to community needs and issues and the tools to meet those needs. Many of these students go on to pursue deeper commitments with participating community based organizations and through their service-learning coursework.

For the Spanish department, this support, along with assistance from the AmeriCorps*VISTA program, helped establish the ¡Juntos Todos Aprendemos! or Together We All Learn engaged department program. During the 2005-2006 academic year, more than 125 students from beginning, intermediate, and advanced Central College Spanish courses served at seven Spanish-language-serving community-based organizations. This work was accomplished with the help of grant funds provided through Learn and Serve America and administered by the Upper Midwest Consortium of Campus Compact.

Service-learning projects performed by the Spanish students included:

- Providing daycare and after school assistance to approximately 100 Latino children
- Providing assistance to over 50 families at income tax preparation clinics
- Disseminating information about higher education opportunities and financial aid to 12 visiting Latino high school students

College students who participated in this project realized increased Spanish language acquisition and enhanced cultural awareness.

Case Study Questions:

- What local institutional resources does your campus provide that might help you support your service-learning course?
- How could a faculty member develop this type of program without the assistance/support of an Office of Community-based Learning or similar department? What other steps would need to be involved?



RECRUITING COMMUNITY PARTNERS

“The point of the year-long service-learning course is to give undergraduate students in their senior year a practical experience, while simultaneously providing a valuable service in the community served by the community partner organization.

Initially, I approached a number of community-based organizations by mail, from small non-profit organizations to the United Way. In this initial letter, I suggested that if they had a project that kept getting put on the back burner due to lack of resources, or needed assistance with a current program now, that they may be interested in having a student work with them over the year-long course. I explained the skills and knowledge of the students, the aims of the service-learning course, the course parameters and asked them to call me if they were interested in finding out more information.

I received a number of calls. From there, I constructed a questionnaire for them to fill out, asking about the mission of their agency, who they serve, describing the proposed project, student specifications (i.e., skills, interests, need for driver’s license, need for criminal background check, etc.), learning opportunities, contact person and so forth. I also followed this up by visiting the agencies myself, talking to them about what they would like done, and how this would best fit in with the course learning objectives and the students’ skills and knowledge.

I confirmed with a select number of community agencies that appeared to have the capacity to provide a student with a meaningful service-learning experience. Descriptions of the agencies and their projects were shared with students on the first day of class and they chose the project they were most interested in. Having done this a number of times now, I have learned that it is better to have the agency interview the student first to make sure it is a ‘fit’ from both perspectives.

Regarding assessment, the students are required to submit progress reports throughout the semester, as well as a final report that reflects on their experience and what they have learned. Feedback is also sought from the partner agencies. This is included in the student’s assessments.

We invite all of the partner agencies to a lunch at the end of the year, where both students and their direct supervisors at the agencies give brief presentations on their service-learning experiences. We use the lunch as an opportunity to debrief on what worked well and what could be improved the next year.”

Case Study Questions:

- How will your plan for developing a service-learning course differ from the scenario presented above? How will it be similar?
- How might you prepare for turnover of stakeholders who are important to your work? For example, what do you do if a community partner drops out mid-way through the course because a key staff person has resigned?
- What plans are in place to acknowledge the efforts of community partners?



APPLICATION OF INITIAL STEPS INVOLVED IN SECURING UNIVERSITY SUPPORT FOR A SERVICE-LEARNING COURSE.

“Several faculty members from my department came up with an idea to develop a service-learning course that would be offered to all undergraduate students at the University. As a first step, the faculty proposed the idea to other department personnel at a departmental meeting. They received “buy in” from the other faculty members and the Chair of the Department, and were instructed to proceed with the development of a course proposal.

Their first step was to meet with the Chair of the University Curriculum Committee and receive instructions on all the documents that were required in order to submit a proposal for a new course. They were informed that an application would need to be filed and approved by the committee one full semester prior to the initial course offering.

Next, the faculty members met with several community agencies that were already affiliated with the department through the undergraduate internship program. The response from one particular agency was very positive, and an agreement was reached to move forward with a course on adolescent health and wellness, with the service component focused on reducing adolescent tobacco use and adolescent initiation of tobacco use in the community. Interviews were conducted with key individuals at the agency and a survey was initiated with teachers at several area middle schools in order to better understand smoking behavior among adolescents in this particular community.

The results of this survey revealed that teachers were very interested in getting involved in a program to reduce smoking and smoking initiation among their students. All of this information, combined with information from the agency and secondary data from the state, was taken back to the university. The faculty invited key members from the university committee to attend a meeting so they could share their findings and obtain a sense of whether or not they would have the support necessary to move forward with a written proposal for the creation of the new course.”

Case Study Questions:

- Are there any key steps that the faculty members may have missed in this process?
- Is it likely that Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval would need to be obtained?
- Did the faculty members miss any key people in the needs assessment process? What about the administrators or the students at the middle schools? Why might it be important to involve these individuals in the process at an early stage?
- Assuming that the faculty members receive a positive response at their initial meeting, what should be their next steps prior to submitting a course proposal?

CHECKLIST

The following checklist list provides key components or “action” items for building your service-learning course infrastructure. Have you:

- Identified the institutional policies and procedures you must follow to develop a service-learning course?
- Determined whether your course will need approval by your curriculum committee?
- Determined whether your course will need approval by the Internal Review Board (IRB)?
- Determined the Community Review Board processes for research in the community if any?

- Established the support of the course from your department leaders, faculty, students and community partners?
- Determined your course staffing needs?
- Acquired the resources that will be needed to support the service-learning?
- Determined ways to involve existing campus offices in your course development?
- Determined whether there are opportunities for student associations or other groups on campus to be involved in the course?
- Designed and implemented a “marketing plan” for the course?
- Identified campus space for meeting and course planning?
- Built the interest, involvement and support of community partners?
- Determined, what if any, community resources will contribute to your activities?



SUGGESTED WEBSITES AND ONLINE RESOURCES

[Federal Government Grants Website](#)

[The Foundation Center](#)

[The Clearinghouse for the Scholarship of Engagement](#). This site provides resources and information for campuses who are seeking to develop or strengthen systems in support of the scholarship of engagement. Information is also available on regional conferences and forums related to the scholarship of engagement.

[Proposal for Service-Learning Designation](#)

Dominican University of California

[Educational Objectives and Graduation Guidelines Taskforce Report and Proposal](#)

Pitzer College