

Service Learning at Texas Tech University

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As higher education continues to develop and evolve, institutions are giving increasing attention to community engagement and involvement, and Texas Tech University (TTU) is no exception. The commitment to service is evidenced in many institutions' mission statements and is realized by faculty, staff and students through their work both in and out of class. Students most frequently engage with the community by participating in community service through social organizations or university coursework, internships, field work, and service learning. While these are all noteworthy and beneficial endeavors for students, this paper will explore the concept of service learning and the ways in which service learning impacts teaching and learning on the university campus and within the community.

What is Service Learning?

As Furco (1996) explains, "Today...the term 'service-learning' has been used to characterize a wide array of experiential education endeavors, from volunteer and community service projects to field studies and internship programs" (p. 2). Considering the varied use of the term "service learning", it has become standard for institutions and organizations to develop and implement their own definition of service learning. In 2003, the TTU Service Learning Advisory Council defined service learning at TTU as "a pedagogy that links academic study and civic engagement through thoughtfully organized service that meets the needs of the community. This service is structured by and integrated into the academic curriculum, which provides opportunities for students to learn and develop through critical reflection." Essentially, the goal of service learning is to equitably merge the acts of service and learning into a reciprocal experience in which both the community and the student are benefited. The ideal outcome is a win-win situation for all involved.

How is Service Learning different from other types of service?

There are innumerable ways for students to become civically engaged and it can be difficult to fully understand the nuances that distinguish one type of service from the next. To help provide a visual representation of how student service programs differ, Furco (1996) developed the following figure (Figure 1), which differentiates each service on a continuum based on the purpose of the service (*Who is the intended beneficiary from the service: the service recipient or provider?*) and the focus of the service (*Is the service being performed because the provider simply seeks to provide service or is the focus more on the learning that occurs through the act of service?*). As Furco (1996) points out, the boundaries between these different programs can easily blur and the key to recognizing the differences lies in the identification of each program's singular characteristics.

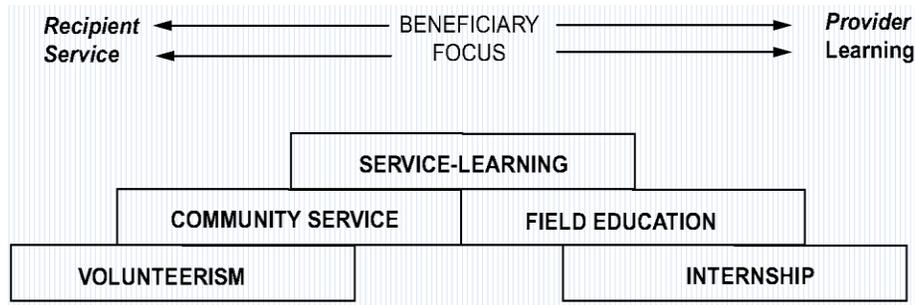


Figure 1: Service-Learning and Community Service: A Comparison

Furco, A. (1996).

As is evident in Figure 1, whereas volunteerism, community service, internships, and field education tend to focus on either serving *or* learning, the pedagogy and practice of service learning attempts to marry service *with* learning so that the needs of the provider/student and

For more detailed information on the various types of service other than service learning, please read the Furco's "Service-Learning: A balanced approach to experiential education."

recipient are met equally. Service learning within the college classroom is also unique in that it provides students with "an opportunity for involvement in the community and meaningful public service in their *academic* life, which is something that no other student activity can offer" (Arellano

& Meaney). Whereas it is often assumed that individuals will grow and reflect in *any* kind of service, a key distinction of service learning is the emphasis placed on critical reflection which integrates students' reflection on both the academic and service elements through methods such as class discussion, journals, blogs, formal papers, etc.

Who Benefits from Service Learning?

As universities across the nation continue to move towards a commitment of being civically engaged institutions, the incorporation of service learning into the classroom provides immeasurable benefit to students, faculty, the university, and the community. Specifically, service learning offers students hands-on opportunities to learn content and concepts, develop professional skills such as critical thinking and communication, cultivate their sense of social awareness, and use their newly acquired knowledge to connect their academic learning with real-life experiences by understanding and undertaking problem solving actions as they relate to real problems. In addition to faculty being able to promote more active and engaged student learning, instructors are also able to develop and implement new teaching methodologies and learning experiences, which often result in additional research and publication opportunities for faculty. Universities receive immeasurable benefit from the publicity obtained through positive community outreach, and also make mutually beneficial connections with community members and organizations through the creation of a culture of engagement in faculty, students, and alumni. Last but not least, aside from the service they are

provided, community partners are able to draw on the disciplinary and scholarly expertise of both students and faculty alike to better meet their needs as they develop a positive and lasting relationship with students, faculty, and institutions. Furthermore, this network helps community partners to build a more civically engaged and dedicated network that is educated and aware of the issues facing the community.

Types of Services in Service Learning

As you consider whether or not service learning is something that could work in your course, it is important to understand that there are different types of service learning and that the level of involvement can be tweaked to best accommodate the needs of each course. There are three types of service learning projects and/or activities that most faculty implement in their courses which include direct service, indirect service and advocacy.

In *Direct Service*, students provide service directly to the clients of the community partner, such as students in an afterschool program, elderly residents in a nursing home, or the homeless at a homeless shelter. One example of a direct service learning project at TTU is a math faculty member who takes students from a math education course to local middle schools to tutor and assist the middle school students with their math skills. After the tutoring sessions, the college students and faculty member meet in the college classroom to discuss the students' reflections on their teaching experiences to troubleshoot and prepare for their next tutoring session so that they might improve and develop as better math teachers.

Through *Indirect Service*, students serve an agency rather than the agency's clientele by providing an administrative service which meets the needs of the agency. For instance, students might provide administrative assistance, fundraising program development, marketing campaigns, architectural design, etc. in order to meet the needs of the agency. An example of indirect service learning at TTU can be seen in upper level management classes in which students spend the semester working with an agency such as the Salvation Army or CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children) developing a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis which they then present to the agency's administration at the end of the semester. Students begin by spending time at the agency to learn about how it functions as well as the population it serves. As they learn various management skills in class, they then implement that knowledge in the development of the SWOT analysis. In the final presentation, students meet with the agency to make recommendations on the implementation of their SWOT analysis, which the agency is then free to use or not use at their discretion.

Through *Advocacy*, students conduct research about, promote, and bring awareness to a particular issue identified by a community partner or agency. Advocacy is designed to address the informational needs and issues of the agency. For example, in a public and social service design class at TTU, an art professor and her students work with PETA

(People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) in the development of promotional materials such as brochures, pamphlets, posters and other visual aids. The agency provides students with all of the literature and information they would like to be integrated into the designs, and the students are able to take that information, apply their knowledge of the visual arts and social design, and develop a campaign advocating the cause identified by PETA.

How do I get involved with Service Learning at Texas Tech?

The Teaching, Learning, and Professional Development Center (TLPDC) at TTU provides a Service Learning Program which makes getting started with service learning simple. The Service Learning Program offers support to faculty through individual consultations on programming, community partners, course design, assessment, and other needs. Through the Service Learning Program, faculty have access to a list of community partners and projects which may be suitable for their course as well as resources for research and publication on service learning.

For more information about service learning at TTU, please [visit our website](#) or contact the TLPDC at 742-0133 or by email at servicelearning@ttu.edu.

Service Learning Program Mission Statement:

The Texas Tech University Service Learning Program provides information, support, and opportunities concerning service learning to students, faculty, and community members, fostering an appreciation of the academic and social values of community engagement.

Resources

Arellano, I. & Meaney, K. (2008). Service learning program faculty handbook.

Campus Compact. (2003). *Introduction to service-learning toolkit* (2nd ed.). Providence, RI: Campus Compact.

Eyler, J. & Giles, D. E. (1999). *Where's the learning in service-learning?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Furco, A. (1996). Service-Learning: A balanced approach to experiential education. In Corporation for National Service (ed.), *Expanding boundaries: Serving and learning*. Washington, D.C.: Corporation for National Service.

Jacoby, B. (1996). *Service-Learning in higher education: Concepts and practices*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Online Resources

Service Learning, Teaching, Learning and Professional Development Center

www.tlpd.ttu.edu/servicelearning

The TLPDC Service Learning website provides additional information on the Service Learning Program at TTU, including details on the Service Learning Faculty Fellows Program, how to obtain S-Designation for service learning courses at TTU, and other necessary information for faculty, students and community partners involved in service learning.

Campus Compact

<http://www.compact.org/>

Campus Compact provides community service and service-learning information to help staff and faculty fund, build, and manage effective programs.

Learn & Serve America

<http://www.learnandserve.gov/>

Learn & Serve America provides direct and indirect support to community groups, higher education institutions, and K-12 schools to facilitate service-learning projects. L&SA provides support in a variety of areas by giving grants for funding, providing training and technical assistance, and the collection and dissemination of research as well as best practices information.

National Service Learning Clearinghouse

<http://www.servicelearning.org/>

A program of Learn and Serve America, the NSLC offers free online resources and the nation's largest library of service-learning materials as well as national service-learning listservs and technical assistance and reference services.