GENERAL INFORMATION
WHAT IS SERVICE LEARNING?

Service Learning (SL) is a specially designed learning experience in which students combine reflection with structured participation in community-based projects to achieve specified learning outcomes as part of an academic course and/or program requirement. By participating in academic community partnerships at the local, national or international level, students gain a richer mastery of course content, enhance their sense of civic responsibility, and ultimately develop a more integrated approach to understanding the relationship between theory, practice, ideas, values, and community.

Service learning is...

- Different from volunteer efforts or community service. When students do community service they help to meet community needs through volunteering. In service learning, students go beyond this by using the service experience as a foundation to examine themselves, their society, and their futures.

- Based on a reciprocal relationship in which the service reinforces and strengthens the learning of the course and the learning reinforces and strengthens the service.

- Integrated into the academic curriculum such that students have structured opportunities to reflect critically on their experiences. This reflection takes place through a combination of writing, reading, speaking, listening, and group discussions.

- An opportunity for students to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their own communities.

- When students earn academic credit for demonstrating that they have learned through service rather than simply putting in the hours.

Service learning fosters a sense of caring for others and a commitment to civic responsibility.

TERMS OF EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Volunteerism: Volunteerism is the engagement of the students in activities where the primary emphasis is on the service being provided and the primary intended beneficiary is clearly the service recipient.

Community service: Community service is the engagement of students in activities that primarily focus on the service being provided as well as the benefits their service activities have on the recipients. The students receive some benefit by learning more about how their service makes a difference in the lives of the service recipients.
**Service learning**: Service learning programs are distinguished from other approaches to experiential education by their intention to equally benefit the provider and the recipient of the service as well as to ensure equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring.

**Field education**: In field education, students perform the service as a part of a program that is designed primarily to enhance students' understanding of a field of study while also providing substantial emphasis on the service being provided.

**Internships and Practicums**: Internships and practicums engage students in service activities primarily for the purpose of providing students with hands-on experiences that enhance their learning or understanding of issues related to a particular area of study.

**SERVICE LEARNING: ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS**

**Reciprocity**: The service and learning must be worthwhile and valuable for both the student and the community. There must be reciprocity between the server and those served.

**Reflection**: Intentional, systematic reflection about the experience must take place in order to accomplish critical thinking in community service experiences. Reflection of the service learning experience encourages introspection of other aspects of the student's life, thereby promoting learning before, during and after the service.

**Meaningful service**: Service tasks need to be worthwhile and challenging in order to strengthen students' critical thinking.

**Diversity**: A priority is placed on involving a broad cross-section of students working in diverse settings and with a diverse population within the community.

**Sustainability**: For Service Learning projects to truly make a difference, long-term benefits to the community, students, and faculty should be considered with every community engaged course.

**Asset Building Model of Service Learning**: In its early years, Service Learning sought to aid community partners and community members by ascertaining their needs and working to fulfill those needs. This needs-based model of service provides temporary solutions to problems that are potentially societal in their scope. An asset building approach to Service Learning seeks to find ways to assess and then increase the
assets of community organizations and their constituents with the goal of seeking long-term and even permanent solutions.

**PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN COMBINING SERVICE AND LEARNING**

An effective service learning program:

- engages people in responsible and challenging actions for the common good.
- provides structured opportunities for people to reflect critically on their service experience.
- articulates clear service and learning goals for everyone involved. From the outset of the project, participants and service recipients alike must have a clear sense of what is to be accomplished and what is to be learned.
- allows for those with needs to define those needs.
- clarifies the responsibilities of each person and organization involved.
- matches service providers and service needs through a process that recognizes changing circumstances.
- expects genuine, active, and sustained organizational commitment.
- includes training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition, and evaluation to meet service and learning goals.
- insures that the time commitment for service and learning is flexible, appropriate, and in the best interests of all involved.
- is committed to program participation by and with diverse populations.

**BENEFITS OF SERVICE LEARNING**

**Benefits to Students**

- Learn from the agency personnel, clientele, experience, and the instructor.
- Explore majors and careers, gain valuable job experience, and strengthen the resume.
- Enhance critical thinking skills and moral/ethical development.
- Provide practical application of academic pursuits.
- Increase understanding of multicultural values and traditions.
Benefits to Faculty

- Form new ways of encouraging students’ academic progress and comprehension.
- Build avenues for greater understanding through intentional critical reflection.
- Improve the motivational base for instruction and learning.
- Generate support and positive publicity in the community.
- Establish relationships with people in the community.

Benefits to the Community

- Increases opportunities for collaboration and the creation of possible solutions.
- Enhances meaningful services to the community.
- Increases awareness of community needs.
- Creates opportunities for community partners to participate in student learning.
- Builds community awareness of college programs and services.

THE MECHANICS OF SERVICE LEARNING

Typically, faculty members incorporate a Service Learning component within their class curriculum, either as an option or as a requirement. Service Learning offers a continuum of possibilities ranging from a one-time service experience (i.e., a half-day city clean-up), to working with the same agency for 2 hours per week over the course of a quarter (i.e., tutoring at-risk youth one afternoon for a 9-10 week period). The range of appropriate placements is circumscribed by the specific content of the particular course. Helping the local Boys and Girls Club increase the number of children served would be very appropriate placement for a marketing class, while tutoring at-risk youth would be more appropriate for an education class.

The faculty member works with the college to carefully choose a limited number of agencies whose needs are related to his or her teaching objectives. The faculty member also sets a minimum number of hours to be completed and develops a reflective component that may include assignments such as journals, reading, class discussions, writing assignments, and class presentations about the service learning experience.

At the beginning of each quarter, the faculty member introduces the service learning component to the class. Students are given information about placement options and choose one of these “approved” placements based on their interests, schedule, and location. The student then calls the agency to set up an interview.
Adjusting to the academic calendar:

Because service is integrated into the class structure, students must be able to complete their placements within the quarter time frame (10 weeks maximum). It takes a couple of weeks to get students assigned, oriented and started. Agencies are asked to adjust by scheduling orientations and trainings at the beginning of the quarter and by developing placements that can be completed in that time frame. Below is an overview of the University of Cincinnati academic calendar indicating approximations of when classes begin and end.

- **Autumn Quarter:** 3rd week of September – 1st week in December
- **Winter Quarter:** 1st week of January – 2nd week in March
- **Spring Quarter:** 3rd week of March – 1st week in June