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 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.

Figure 1. Essential Components of the Service Learning Model

As suggested by this diagram, Service Learning is a course-based credit-bearing experience that allows students to:

- Participate in an organized service activity that meets community needs, and to
- Reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995)

Service Learning, therefore, differs from volunteer efforts or community service by going beyond meeting community needs to equally benefit students by means of enhancing and strengthening their learning of the course objectives and by further understanding themselves, their society, and their futures. This unique reciprocity and emphasis on reflection is also what sets Service Learning apart from other areas of experiential learning at UC, including internships for credit, co-op, undergraduate research, and international programs.
In considering the University of Cincinnati’s Integrated Core Learning Baccalaureate Competencies and keeping current Service Learning best practices in mind, Service Learning also enhances the following:

- Social Responsibility
- Knowledge Integration
- Communication
- Critical Thinking
- Meaningful Service
- Asset Building

Many of these benefits can be obtained along the spectrum from community awareness courses to capstone Service Learning courses.

![Figure 2: Community Engaged Course Continuum](image)

Service Learning combines course content and community service-projects with reflection activities to aid students in making connections between them. It is possible for students to become aware of the community around them without a service project or even a declared community partner. The box at the left of the continuum represents a course in which students become aware of their surrounding community through observation. The oval in the center represents a course with a declared community partner but that assists students with their understanding of aspects of the community without engaging in a service project. The circle on the right represents a Service Learning course as described briefly above and in more detail in this handbook.

Members of the UC faculty are encouraged to review their courses and consider which level of engagement may best fit their course needs. See “Creating a Service Learning Course” in the Planning and Course Development section for suggested and required guidelines in developing a Service Learning course. All faculty who are teaching courses that foster community awareness can utilize this information, keeping in mind that this handbook was designed to exemplify Service Learning.