

What is Service-Learning?

The definition of service-learning varies among those who embrace it. At its crux, service-learning is a form of experimental learning that incorporates community work into the curriculum and helps to create an active citizen with a passion for lifelong learning. This gives students real-world learning experiences that enhance their academic learning while providing a tangible benefit for the community. Service-learning can be used to increase the citizenship skills of participants of any age or background.

Statistics

Multiple studies have been conducted on the impacts of service-learning. It affects both academics and personal growth of students involved. Service-learning also has positive impacts on faculty members. According to a study led by Vanderbilt University (Eyler, Giles, Stenson, and Gray, 1-10), there are many effects of service-learning on students:

- Service-learning has a positive effect on student personal development such as sense of personal efficacy, personal identity, spiritual growth, and moral development.
- Service-learning has a positive effect on interpersonal development and the ability to work well with others, leadership, and communication skills.
- Service-learning has a positive effect on reducing stereotypes and facilitating cultural and racial understanding.
- Service-learning may subvert as well as support course goals of reducing stereotyped thinking and facilitating cultural and racial understanding.
- Service-learning has a positive effect on sense of social responsibility and citizenship skills.
- Service-learning has a positive effect on commitment to service.
- Volunteer service in college is associated with involvement in community service after graduation.

As we urge you to consider implementing service-learning projects into your curriculum, know that the benefits are not only for your students, but for you as well:

- Faculty using service-learning report satisfaction with quality of student learning.
- Faculty using service-learning report commitment to research.
- Faculty using service-learning encourage interactive teaching methods and reciprocal learning between students and faculty.
- Faculty using service-learning add new insights and dimensions to class discussions.
- Faculty using service-learning lead to new avenues for research and publication.
- Faculty using service-learning promote students' active learning; engage students with different learning styles.

Options and Examples

Projects for service-learning come in all shapes and sizes. The Student Community Service office at Eastern Illinois University has often worked alongside faculty members to cultivate successful service-learning projects. Projects can be developed for certain populations, such as:

- Children/youth
- Disabled
- Elderly
- English as a second language
- International
- Low income

Options and Examples

Service projects can also be developed based on certain issues, such as:

- Diversity
- Education
- Environmental issues
- Health and safety
- Hunger and/or homelessness
- Religious issues
- Youth issues

Examples of service-learning projects may include (many of these have been completed or inspired by various EIU classes):

- In an engineering design course, students design and build mechanical devices to assist people with physical, developmental or learning disabilities.
- Computer science student projects develop databases or websites for local non-profit agencies.
- As part of a biochemistry course, students conduct seminars for teens on the effects of substance abuse on the body.
- Anthropology students are encouraged to volunteer in elderly support organizations providing the students opportunities to explore the applications of course content to real world events.
- Accounting students work with neighborhood advisory boards developing and leading workshops for residents of low-income areas on household finances, budgeting, etc.
- Environmental Science students conduct an energy survey and make recommendations for energy savings in businesses, homes and schools.
- Business and sociology majors work with local food pantry to help improve efficiency for food pantry and clients.
- History students publish a local cultural journal that reports on unique community aspects.
- Education majors coordinate and execute various afterschool programs in the area with various curriculum focuses.
- Political Science students work with grass roots senior citizen's groups to lobby for legislation that better meets older people's needs. Grass roots organizing techniques are stressed.

Conclusion

By incorporating meaningful service initiatives into your curriculum, students can expand their knowledge in a variety of high impact ways. This includes learning about pertinent social justice issues facing their community, grow their problem solving and critical thinking abilities, develop socially and ethically, and discover their active place and responsibility as civic leaders in the world. In line with EIU's core values, the Student Community Service office believes that students should stand in partnership with their surrounding communities, locally, nationally, and globally to help solve pressing social issues.

Adapted from:

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

Information from:

www.campuscompact.org