Assessment of Service Learning: Understanding and Communicating the Value of Student Experience

Sponsored by the Service Learning and Civic Engagement Working Group of the NASPA Region VI Knowledge Community: Student Affairs Partnering with Academic Affairs. In connection with the Region VI Assessment, Evaluation and Research Knowledge Community

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Student Affairs Partnering with Academic Affairs KC

Service Learning and Civic Engagement (SLCE) Working Group

- Purpose: to organize dialogue and knowledge-sharing among student life professionals who are passionate (or curious) about the practice of service learning and civic engagement, how they relate to our educational mission and professional goals, and why they might be among the most impactful strategies for student development and institutional transformation.
Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Knowledge Community (AERKC)

The AERKC “encourages and supports student affairs professionals, faculty, and graduate students at institutions...throughout the world as they systematically assess learning, evaluate programs, and research theory and practice as it relates to our profession.

- We provide education on assessment, evaluation and research through a variety of cost effective methods.
- Strive to create and share innovative ways of assessing
- Provide support and networking opportunities
- Assist campuses to move forward...by providing short term consulting at conferences

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- Join any Knowledge Community by clicking "membership" from the NASPA homepage, then select "Update Membership Profile & Preferences" and scroll to "Knowledge Community Preferences."
- Contact your Regional KC Chair to discuss how you might get involved in your geographic region.
- Attend regional and national conferences.
- Join the listserv for your Knowledge Community. Please email the NASPA office at subscribe@naspa.org and specify the name of the knowledge community listserv. NASPA will add you within a few business days.
Service learning assessment webinar learning outcomes

As a result of participating in this webinar, participants will be able to:

- (1) Articulate the value of assessment of experiential programs, and service learning in particular.
- (2) Write a student learning outcome for service learning.
- (3) Use best practices to plan an assessment of their service learning programs.
Poll

Who in the audience has or is currently involved in providing service learning experiences to students? Yes or No
Introduction & theoretical frames: Dewey, Piaget, Furco, etc.

- **Experience, for Dewey (1936), is active engagement** in social life aimed at expanding one’s capacity for growth.

- “Every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts...while this modification affects...the quality of subsequent experiences” (p. 35).

- Ideas are formed and re-formed based on the interaction of the individual’s process of learning new ideas and assimilating these ideas (Kolb, 1984, p. 23).
Kolb Model: The 4 Abilities Needed for Effective Learning

- **CONCRETE EXPERIENCE** abilities (CE): to involve oneself fully, openly and without bias in new experience, making the implicit explicit

- **ABSTRACT CONCEPTUALIZATION** abilities (AC): to create concepts that integrate their observations into logically sound theories

- **REFLECTIVE OBSERVATION** abilities (RO): to reflect on and observe their experiences from many perspectives

- **ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION** (AE): to use theories to make decisions and solve problems

The learner continually chooses which set of abilities to use in a specific situation
Today’s focus: Service learning: A type of experience-based learning

Learning that includes making connections and synthesizing information between course content and co-curricular experiences

- Components of meaningful service learning: (1) mutuality (mutual construction of the experience), (2) personalization (interaction), and reflection (connecting academic and personal lives) (Baxter-Magolda, 2004, p. 302).

- “Change-oriented service-learning enhances students’ civic-political capacity by deepening their understanding of issues impacting their community, developing self-efficacy as civic actors, and fostering interdependence through collective action” (Iverson & James, 2013, p. 90).
Is service learning worth it?

- Igniting an individual’s intrinsic motivation increases the effectiveness of learning overall (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

- When a student is making connections between contexts, new ideas, and reflecting on the meaningfulness of this experience, the confluence of activity can create a transformative experience” (Lysaker & Furuness, 2011, p. 195).

- Service learning students learn to deal with ill-structured problems and solutions which are complex, uncertain, and open-ended (Eyler & Giles, 1999).
Is service learning worth it (con’t.)?

- Employers want to hire graduates who have interpersonal abilities such as conflict resolution skills (Dahlgren, 2007).

- Reduce negative stereotypes. “...diversity was a predictor of cultural appreciation (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 34).

- There is a gap between students’ expectations of becoming involved in serving the community as an undergraduate, and how students describe actual opportunities (National Task Force, 2012, p. 5).

- Students are more likely to graduate if they are socially and academically involved in their colleges (Tinto, 1993).
Experiential involvement ➔ whole community learning

- “Learning is the least useful when it is private; it is most useful when it is public” (Schulman cited in Eyler & Giles, 1999).

- Social problem solving depends on social capital which is created in ongoing community relationships.

- This is civic education at its best, taking ownership and acting to make a difference in one’s community (Liazos & Liss, 2009).
Implementing service learning IDEA 1: Use theory (Kolb) to articulate planning & practice

- **Step 1: Concrete experience**: Students gain an experience that is connected to course content.
- **Step 2: Reflective observation**: Students reflect on that experience from many perspectives.
- **Step 3: Abstract conceptualization**: Foster reflection & meaning making through intentionally prompting students to connect experience with course content.
- **Step 4: Active Experimentation**: Students form new strategies for action and participation in the community (Eyler & Giles, p. 195).
Implementing SL IDEA 2: The Development Of Political Awareness And Social Justice Citizenship Through Community Based Learning in a First-year General Education Seminar (Schamber & Mahoney, 2008)

1) Assessed a community based learning (CBL) experience in a first-year general education seminar on social issues.

2) Mixed methods investigated civic engagement attitudes, & themes embedded in papers.

3) Results: The short duration experience strengthened political awareness & social justice attitudes.

4) Implications include the evidence that participating in CBL mediates the development of empathy.
Theoretical Framework & Research Background

- Social justice education – aims at social reform through civic participation (Saltmarsh, 2005). Community based learning (service learning): goals and motives beyond charity and toward participatory actions with the community

- “Mentor Seminar II: Today’s Decisions”, an interdisciplinary general education seminar

- Curricular components: (1) analysis of articles on civic engagement & social justice issues, (2) teams write a 25-page policy paper, (3) students use Rubin’s A Citizen’s Guide to Politics in America for integrating experiences and course content, and (4) learning experience at a non-profit agency that is affected by the policy studied by the student group
Results & Discussion

- CBL students showed a statistically significant increase in political awareness and social justice attitudes. For the non CBL students there were no significant changes.

- Interviewed CBL students explained the gain in political awareness was related to an empathetic response toward community needs that motivated them to learn.

- The grounded theory revealed new, political, knowledge consistent with an informed citizen advocate.

- The results support Saltmarsh’s (2008) arguments that some of the benefits of CBL are the development of political knowledge and democratic values.

- The grounded theory contributes to the literature on ways that participating in community mediates the empathetic awareness of others’ needs toward an equitable society.
How can I show value is added by service learning?

The Assessment Cycle:

1. Write student learning outcomes
2. Choose method(s) for assessing outcomes and the instruments for measurement
3. Identify interventions or programs that address the outcomes
4. Collect and analyze the data
5. Report the results and recommend improvements for the next iteration
6. Write student learning outcomes

Repeat the cycle.
Writing learning outcomes: Be mindful that...

- Assessment is about what we want them to know or be able to do, not about what we want to teach them.

- Assessment fundamentally is about changing our programs so all students can succeed.

- Learning is a transformation of the individual, not simply the accumulation of ideas.
Poll

- Who has experience with writing student learning outcomes for curricular or co-curricular experiences? Yes or No
Your turn…

- Draft a student learning outcome related to a service learning experience you currently teach or would hope to teach in the future.

- Check to see that the outcome is student-learning focused. Try using this easy model for writing an outcome:

  As a result of participating in our ________________ program, students will be able to demonstrate________________________.
EXAMPLE STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES: As a result of participating in this civic engagement course, students will be able to:

- Describe “issues of social concern from multiple perspectives and to formulate and express an informed opinion on these issues” (Liason & Liss, 2009, p. 6).

- Demonstrate “the ability to relate academic materials to their practical applications regarding issues of social concern (p. 7).

- Demonstrate “the motivation and capacity to utilize these abilities to take action in the community” (p. 7).
After you draft the outcome take it though the following checklist:

✓ Does your outcome address what the students will know or be able to do as a result of your program (student learning outcome)? Or does it address what the program is designed to do (program outcome)? Check to see that the outcome is a student-learning outcome.

✓ Is the outcome stated in language that is concise and appropriate? Can it be stated in simpler language and/or fewer words?

✓ Can specific learning experiences (activities, programming) be thought of that would lead to attainment of the outcome?

✓ Are there several opportunities (programs, etc.) available to achieve the outcome, i.e., what might be your “Plan B”? 
Final tips on excellence in implementing service learning

- Provide students with opportunities to work together in and outside of the classroom and make implicit knowledge explicit (Kolb’s concrete experience).

- Organize scenarios for students that ask them to apply knowledge, explain their ideas, and construct arguments based on academic evidence in relation to their co-curricular, service learning experience. (Integrated learning)

- Create opportunities to assess learning by tapping into students’ experiential learning processes, understanding, and problem solving (Morrison, Ross & Kemp, 2007).
Confucius on developing toward wholeness

“By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest” (Confucius cited in Trinh & Kolb, 2012).
References


