

## SERVICE-LEARNING IN PRACTICE



### OUTCOMES

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- Structure your roles and responsibilities as an academic staff member developing, implementing and evaluating a service-learning module.
- Schedule your activities according to the proposed timeline:
  - Before the module starts;
  - During the first weeks of the module;
  - During the module;
  - At the end of the module; and
  - After the module.
- Complete the template for the design of a module integrating service-learning in the curriculum by ensuring that you have included all the practice principles. Use Appendix A: SECTIONS A and B. You may find it useful to draw on the content of Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9 to complete the template.

### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the practice of service-learning. From Chapter 1 to 6 you have learned about the theory – what to do and how to do it. In this chapter we will demonstrate service-learning practice from our own experiences. As stated in Chapter 4, it is not always a smooth ‘journey’ but as a pedagogy, when put into practice and when well supported, service-learning is a powerful learning experience for you and your students. To experience and assess students’ increased understanding and improved application of curriculum content (enhanced academic learning), personal growth (inter- and intrapersonal learning) and deeper appreciation of social responsibility (relevant and meaningful service with the community) contributes to our motivation to sustain service-learning in the curriculum. We hope the same will be true for you.

Complying with all the key principles of service-learning as a pedagogy, as well as recognising all the role-players in the process, can become quite a ‘messy business’. Experienced practitioners have articulated some valuable processes for effective service-learning programmes. When you plan, implement and evaluate a service-learning module, consider adapting the principles that follow.

## 7.2 BEFORE THE MODULE STARTS

Good planning of your service-learning module prior to implementation is essential to success. Before the module starts:

- Reflect on your goals, commitment and learning outcomes.
- Discuss preliminary ideas with the service-learning/ community engagement office on campus.
- Contact potential community and service partners.
- Obtain institutional approval for the module.

### 7.2.1 *Reflect on your goals, commitment and learning outcomes*

**Reflect on your commitment:** Before you commit yourself to embarking on this exciting but strenuous journey, it may be useful to reflect on your own commitment to and interest in service-learning.

**Suitability of module:** What are your goals for your students in the service experience? What are the types of community and service partners or projects you think would be valuable to stimulate learning in your module? Determine how service-learning relates to your module's objectives.

### 7.2.2 *Discuss preliminary ideas with the service-learning/ community engagement office on campus*

If your institution has a service-learning/ community engagement office on campus with staff members dedicated to service-learning activities, it can be a valuable support system during your service-learning endeavours. Meeting with the staff at this point can assist you in refining your ideas.

Such an office could provide you with valuable information, such as:

- A menu of potential service sites, with position descriptions and contact information;
- Existing service-learning modules and details of the faculty members involved;
- Ideas on module development: outcomes, learning activities, reflection and assessment;
- Guidelines for partnerships;
- Logistical, risk management and troubleshooting considerations; and
- Available assistance: student assistant roles, financial support, other resources and workshops in the field of service-learning.



Both the CHESP website ([www.chesp.org.za](http://www.chesp.org.za)) and the Campus Compact website ([www.compact.org](http://www.compact.org)) offer valuable information.

Other pre-implementation planning activities that you should conduct include the following:

- Familiarise yourself with existing service-learning projects at your institution;
- Meet with likeminded colleagues; and
- Discuss your intentions with members of your faculty/ department/ school.

### **Familiarise yourself with existing service-learning projects at your institution**

In order to avoid duplication and to facilitate networking with colleagues in the service-learning field, visit your institution's community engagement website or the service-learning/ community engagement office on campus for information on existing initiatives.

### **Meet with likeminded colleagues**

Colleagues who have been involved in service-learning modules before or who are interested in new and innovative teaching methodologies can be a valuable source of information and support. It is important to tap into first-hand experience of the challenges of service-learning in the form of colleagues who have already learnt from the field.

### **Discuss your intentions with members of your faculty/ department/ school**

Service-learning cannot be a 'one-person show'. For ensured sustainability, you are going to need the support of your faculty/ department/ school. The sooner you get your colleagues' buy-in, the better.

## **7.2.3 Contact potential community and service partners**

Refer to Chapter 5: *Partnership Development for Service-Learning* for more information. The success (suitability, applicability, feasibility and sustainability) of service-learning activities is seated in partnerships. The sooner you secure this partnership, the sooner you can begin building strong relationships with the various participants in the service-learning process – and this will enhance your chances of success. Again, the service-learning/ community engagement office on campus can help you to identify potential community and service partners.

*Visiting* your suggested community site(s) provides an understanding of the service context within which your students will be working. Explore the community or service agency in terms of:

- Missions, goals and activities;
- Ideas and initiatives;
- Specific needs, opportunities and resources;
- Contact person(s) and location details;
- Number of students that can be accommodated;
- Orientation and training requirements; and
- Hours of service required.

When meeting with potential community and service partners to negotiate projects, it is important to articulate – orally and in writing – the objective(s) of the service assignment and your expectations for your students' on-site learning experience. It is helpful to have some information available to describe what you and your students have to offer the community and service partners. Bring extra copies of your module descriptors (even if only in rough draft form), with a statement of the module's purpose, outcomes (specifically service-learning goals), timeline (with hours per week) and limitations.

### **Finalise service-learning placement options**

After your community visits, it will be possible to identify community needs that may be most relevant to your module's outcomes. If the needs of the community align with your learning outcomes, formalise the partnership, establish communication protocols and share an updated draft of the module curriculum.

After you have finalised agreements and arrangements regarding the service-learning site, it is important to visit or call or send out a follow-up letter to the community and/or service partner; this enhances coordination and helps ensure everyone is in agreement. Also remember to provide your contact information to all community and service partners.

#### **7.2.4 Obtain institutional approval for the module**

Refer to Chapter 3: *An Integrated Curriculum Model for Service-Learning* for more information. It is possible that your institution will have some processes and procedures for registering new or adapted modules. The following will be crucial steps and processes:

- Develop the curriculum;
- Plan logistics; and
- Inform the service-learning/ community engagement office on campus.

### **Develop the curriculum**

Refer to Chapter 3: *An Integrated Curriculum Model for Service-Learning*. As you discovered in Chapter 3, the most successful service-learning projects provide students with a clear picture of the place of service-learning in the module. The module descriptors help students understand how service-learning is an integral part of the module. It is important to provide students with what they need to develop a clear understanding of the link between module content, service activity and student assessment and success in the module.

Thus, when developing the curriculum, consider including:

- An explanation that the module contains a service-learning component;
- The incentive(s) for successful completion of the service-learning experience;
- A statement integrating module and service outcomes/ objectives – describe the service-learning activity and its relation to module objectives;

- An explication of all learning activities: classroom-based learning, as well as site-based service-learning;
- A calendar: schedule of classes and service-learning events;
- Reflection activities (journal writing, other written reflection formats, in-class discussions or a combination of these), with guidelines explaining to students how to engage in these reflection activities; and
- Assessment activities: writing assignments, discussion of topics, readings, presentations and other activities.

### **Plan logistics**

A major issue when integrating service-learning in a module is making logistical arrangements. It is important to formulate a comprehensive plan of action before the module begins. Logistical arrangements include:

- Transportation;
- Scheduling;
- Budgeting; and
- Agreements and liability.

**Transportation:** You are going to need to decide whether you will ask students to make use of the institution's vehicles, community transport or their own, private vehicles. (See hints for drivers/ passengers in the University of Pretoria's policy in Appendix **E**.)

**Scheduling:** You will need to consider where in the class schedule service-learning activities will fit; and whether scheduling will be coordinated in a centralised manner or left up to the students.

**Budgeting:** An important consideration will be how much money you are going to need for implementation and from where you will access the financing. (See Appendix **F** for an example of a grant application, from the University of the Free State.)

**Agreements and liability:** Consider whether you are going to make use of agreements to formalise commitment and clearly convey responsibilities. (See Appendix **B** for an example of a service-learning agreement, adapted from the California State University.)

### **Inform the service-learning/ community engagement office on campus**

In order to assist the office in coordinating all service activities at your institution, provide a copy of your module descriptors, agreements and partnership arrangements.

## 7.3 THE FIRST WEEKS OF THE MODULE

Once the module has been developed and advance planning is complete, the implementation phase raises new challenges. The following timeline can help you to remember key steps in assuring quality as you implement your service-learning module:

- Introduce students to the concept of service-learning;
- Conduct student orientation and organise logistics;
- Attend to agreements;
- Conduct pre-implementation questionnaires and focus groups;
- Students make first contact with the community site; and
- Establish and maintain a database.

### 7.3.1 *Introduce students to the concept of service-learning*

Refer to Chapter 3: *An Integrated Curriculum Model for Service-Learning* for more information. On the first day of class, when introducing the module to the students, explain that it will entail service-learning. Consider including:

- What service-learning pedagogy is (unique features and methods);
- Why you have decided to use service-learning;
- How the learning objectives and service objectives relate;
- How the site(s) and types of service chosen relate;
- How service-learning enhances the module;
- The nature of the service objectives (i.e. on site or in class) and class-related tasks (reflection, journals and projects);
- How reflection and assessment will be conducted;
- Clear guidelines for assignments, and grading criteria; and
- What types of service objectives students might develop with their community and/or service agencies.

### 7.3.2 *Conduct student orientation and organise logistics*

To increase the likelihood of success and also to ensure reciprocal protection of your students and the community, it is crucial to prepare students for their service experience. Keep in mind that your students will present a range of levels of previous community exposure and a range of developmental levels. Adequate orientation and training can be conducted in class, or preferably at the site where the activities will take place. It is a good idea to include the community and service partner in the orientation and to host a panel discussion providing students with multiple perspectives on the task at hand. Issues to address during orientation include:

- General logistical considerations regarding the students;
- Broader issues relating to the project; and
- Students' expectations and responsibilities.

**General logistical considerations regarding the students (this can also be included in the learning agreement):**

- What they will be doing;
- Where they will be going;
- When they will be going;
- How much service is expected (defined by number of hours or other criteria);
- What types of service are suitable to the learning objectives of the module;
- Record keeping (the documentation, if any, you will require of the student as evidence of service completed);
- Time record form documenting time at the community site or hours spent on the project. See Appendix **G** for an example of a time record form;
- Timeline/ benchmarks for:
  - Contacting the agency;
  - Meeting with supervisors;
  - Signing agreements;
  - Beginning the service;
  - Completing the service; and
  - Due dates for journals, reflection activities, papers, presentations, evaluations.
- Transportation (see hints for drivers/ passengers in the University of Pretoria's policy in Appendix **E**);
- Budgetary issues;
- Protocol/ professionalism: policies, procedures, dress, manners, punctuality, etc. See Appendix **H** for an example of an ethical code of conduct;
- Courtesy: behaviour and attitudes toward community and service agency partners;
- Risk management; and
- Problem solving regarding:
  - Typical problems experienced;
  - Difficult situations that may arise; and
  - Whom to contact if there is a problem at the site.

**Broader issues relating to the project:**

- History, mission, structure and location of the service sites;
- Background and description of the individuals to be served;
- Social, political and economic issues related to the service site setting;
- Standard operating procedures and activities of the service agency;
- Norms and expectations in the workplace, especially regarding such issues as dress, punctuality and professionalism;
- Type of work in which students would engage; and
- Type of training and supervision to expect from participating agencies.

It would be valuable for students to receive a copy of any relevant manuals relating to the community or service agency.

**Students' expectations and responsibilities:**

- Ask students what prior experience they have working with people from diverse backgrounds.
- Ask what students hope to gain from the project.
- Discuss students' stereotypes, impressions and assumptions about the population with whom they will be working.
- Address student concerns, fears and expectations.
- Discuss confidentiality and professional ethics.
- Prepare students with the appropriate skills.
- Brief students on their responsibilities regarding: task assignments, expectations, role definition, communication, follow-through and professionalism.

**Possible orientation activities:**

- Videos/ multimedia;
- Talks by previous students;
- Talks by partners;
- Posters/ material of the previous year;
- Site visit; and
- Community or service partner to facilitate first visit.

Before you send your students into the community, make sure they are fully prepared and can answer all the question relating to the Who, What, When, Where and Why of the service-learning module.

**7.3.3 Attend to agreements**

Refer to Chapter 6: *Risk Management and Agreements for Service-Learning* for more information on liability issues.

Agreements can be helpful in formalising the commitment of all the partners and enhancing the credibility of the experience. Agreements should depict the tasks, expectations and professional demeanour expected from everyone and clearly convey to all that they have an obligation to fulfil their responsibilities. Furthermore, the agreement enables students to negotiate their learning and service goals with staff and the community representative. (See Appendix B for an example of a service-learning agreement, adapted from the California State University.)

**7.3.4 Conduct pre-implementation questionnaires and focus groups**

If you are interested in determining the impact (learning and growth) of the service-learning module on the students, community and service partners, it is important to collect some baseline information before the start of the service-learning activities. A pre-implementation questionnaire or focus group discussion can be a good point of departure. See Appendix I for an example of pre- and post-implementation focus groups for students (CHESP, 2005) and Appendix J for an example of pre- and post-implementation questionnaires for students (CHESP, 2005).

### **7.3.5 Students make first contact with the community site**

After the orientation, students should be prompted to make initial contact with the community site (either appointed or of their own choice). Encourage your students to be accountable, committed and proactive, and to take responsibility for the project from the outset. To assist students, provide structure in the form of a deadline for:

- Making contact with the community;
- Providing feedback to you on:
  - Selected sites (agency contact information);
  - Selected projects;
  - Agreement forms; and
  - Planning sheets.

Review service-learning sites, project selection and students' planning, make adjustments as necessary and approve (or reject) the students' projects as quickly as possible. The service-learning assignment is now finalised and students can continue.

### **7.3.6 Establish and maintain a database**

To enable monitoring and assist you in future activities, compile a database with service site details, student contact details and information about activities performed.

## **7.4 DURING THE MODULE**

As you continue in the semester, you should consider the following:

- Maintain community and service partner communication;
- Monitor student progress;
- Facilitate reflection activities; and
- Conduct formative assessment activities.

### **7.4.1 Maintain community and service partner communication**

Refer to Chapter 5: *Partnership Development for Service-Learning* for more information. You acknowledge that service-learning is a partnership, by maintaining contact and regular communication with community and service partners throughout the semester – both to monitor student involvement and progress and to discuss any questions or concerns the partners may have. Visit the agency when possible to gain first-hand exposure.

#### **7.4.2 Monitor student progress**

Students have the tendency to either underestimate or overestimate the service-learning task at hand. To help students stay on track and meet deadlines, as well as to anticipate problems, it is important to monitor student involvement and progress. This enables you to make changes to facilitate learning, ensure service-learning projects connect to module content, and improve partner satisfaction. Consider using:

- Classroom questions and discussions;
- Time log/ record form;
- Journals and other forms of reflection;
- Progress reports;
- Calls to the site supervisor;
- Individual check-ins/ visits to the service site;
- Individual and group supervision;
- Sessions to share concerns, success stories and special requests;
- Rough drafts or subparts of the final product (if applicable); and
- Presentations.

Constant feedback by the academic on the above activities will enhance student growth and development.

#### **7.4.3 Facilitate reflection activities**

Refer to Chapter 4: *Service-Learning in the Curriculum* for more information. In Chapter 4 we learned that structured reflection opportunities facilitate learning and help to tie service activities to module concepts and theories. Reflection provides a forum for synthesising theory and service, and assessing learning effectiveness. Feedback allows you to modify the module as necessary.

#### **7.4.4 Conduct formative assessment activities**

Refer to Chapter 4: *Service-Learning in the Curriculum* for more information. All the above suggestions (for monitoring student progress) can be used to conduct a mid-semester evaluation – using the results to make mid-semester modifications and necessary changes in requirements and procedures.

## 7.5 END OF THE MODULE

When the semester is coming to an end, there are some activities you can consider in order to ensure you tie up all the loose ends:

- Closure/ wrap up;
- Collect time record forms and other products of the experience;
- Conduct summative assessment;
- Get feedback from all partners; and
- Celebrate accomplishments.

### 7.5.1 Closure/ wrap up

Instruct students regarding how to wrap up their service projects. This includes helping students to reach closure with, and say good-bye and thank you to, the community, service agency and partners.

### 7.5.2 Collect time record forms and other products of the experience

In order to verify that students have indeed fulfilled their commitments to the community and service agency, it is important at this point to collect evidence of students' activities throughout the semester, e.g. time record forms and other products of the experience.

### 7.5.3 Conduct summative assessment

It is now time to conduct assessment of learning and evaluation of student performance. Always remember to evaluate *learning* from experience (rather than the experience itself). Summative assessment can be done through:

- Individual or group assignments;
- Final reports/ assignments including students' journals, reflection activities and other forms of continuous assessment;
- Classroom displays;
- Video/ multimedia presentations;
- Panel discussions; and
- Student presentations.

All these activities should encourage students to

- Share with one another what they have learned;
- Demonstrate how they have accomplished the learning outcomes set at the beginning of the module; and
- Integrate the module content and the service experience.

#### **7.5.4 Get feedback from all partners**

It is important to provide opportunities for all the partners to give their evaluation of and feedback on the service-learning experience. Be sure to include all partners in these activities as every partner can offer a different perspective and observations and informed insight into the service-learning experience. Consider using:

- Individual and group reflection forums/ focus groups; and
- Post-implementation questionnaires completed by students, community and service partners, as well as the module lecturer. (If you did administer pre-implementation questionnaires, an equivalent post-implementation questionnaire can provide a valuable measure of change.)

See Appendix **I** for an example of pre- and post-implementation focus groups for students (CHESP, 2005) and Appendix **J** for an example of pre- and post-implementation questionnaires for students (CHESP, 2005).

#### **7.5.5 Celebrate accomplishments**

A celebration/ ceremony/ workshop/ presentation (or any other act of care, appreciation and recognition) is an important part of any successful service-learning experience. Service students get the opportunity to share what they have learned, and present their finished projects as well as any products they have created. This allows students to share with their classmates what they have been working on and provides closure for all the participants. Be sure to involve all the partners of the project in these celebrations. Also consider inviting other members of the faculty, administration and community to share your successes. (This celebration day could also form part of your summative assessment.)

### **7.6 AFTER THE MODULE**

Before you conclude your activities for this implementation cycle, there are some tasks that are valuable to complete:

- Give recognition to all partners.
- Meet with the partners to evaluate results and plan needed revisions.
- Self-evaluate programme success and revise for the next implementation.
- Provide feedback to the service-learning/ community engagement office on campus.
- Write up your learning experiences and publish them.

#### **7.6.1 Give recognition to the partners**

The success of a service-learning project depends largely on the strength of the partnerships that exist among all the role-players. Ensure that you show your appreciation and give recognition to everybody involved. Consider:

- Community representative;
- Service agency;

- Site supervisors;
- Those who have provided financial assistance; and
- Those involved in logistics (transport);

The following can be valuable:

- A thank-you letter from you and your students;
- Information about what the experience with the organisation has given the students;
- An invitation to celebrations and/or summative assessment activities (as previously mentioned); and
- A personal visit.

Any documentation you have available (such as student projects) can be of value to your partners and sharing such documentation with them could encourage them to continue with future projects.

### **7.6.2 Meet with the partners to evaluate results and plan needed revisions**

All the partners involved in the project can be a valuable source of information. Consultation and reflection with everybody involved can provide you with ideas on how to improve the next round of implementation.

### **7.6.3 Self-evaluate programme success and revise for the next implementation**

Refer to Chapter 9: *Managing and Enhancing the Quality of Service-Learning*; and Appendices **K-S** for more information.

In order to determine the success of the implementation, as well as whether the project is of benefit to all participants, make use of all the formative and summative evaluations, as well as quantitative and qualitative data obtained from your partners:

- Post-implementation questionnaires;
- Post-implementation focus groups;
- Reflections;
- Assessments (formative and summative); and
- Module evaluations.

**7.6.4 Provide feedback to the service-learning/ community engagement office on campus**

‘Debriefing’ with the service-learning/ community engagement office regarding successes and challenges and potential improvements/ changes can serve as a way of exchanging information that can be of value to both parties.

**7.6.5 Write up your learning experiences and publish them**

To ensure that your service-learning activities become part of an academic scholarship of engagement, try to publish your activities or present your programme at a conference. This can be valuable:

- For your future in the academic world;
- As an opportunity for networking;
- As documentation for future reference and funding;
- As feedback to partners; and
- To interested colleagues.



**SELF-STUDY ACTIVITY**

The following grid proposed by Kaye (2004) could be of value. Try to complete the grid for every phase of your service-learning project.

<i>WHO</i>	<i>SHOULD DO WHAT</i>	<i>BY WHEN</i>	<i>RESOURCES</i>

**Table 7.1:** Checklist for Service-Learning in Practice

<b>BEFORE THE MODULE STARTS</b>	<b>✓</b>
Reflect on your goals, commitment and learning outcomes.	
Discuss preliminary ideas with the service-learning/ community engagement office on campus.	
Familiarise yourself with existing service-learning projects at your institution.	
Meet with likeminded colleagues.	
Discuss your intentions with members of your faculty/ department/ school.	
Contact potential community and service partners.	
Finalise service-learning placement options.	
Obtain institutional approval for the module.	
Develop the curriculum.	
Plan logistics.	
Inform the service-learning/ community engagement office on campus.	
<b>THE FIRST WEEKS OF THE MODULE</b>	<b>✓</b>
Introduce students to the concept of service-learning.	
Conduct student orientation and organise logistics.	
Attend to agreements.	
Conduct pre-implementation questionnaires and focus groups.	
Students make first contact with the community site.	
Establish and maintain a database.	
<b>DURING THE MODULE</b>	<b>✓</b>
Maintain community and service partner communication.	
Monitor student progress.	
Facilitate reflection activities.	
Conduct formative assessment activities.	
<b>END OF THE MODULE</b>	<b>✓</b>
Closure/ wrap up.	
Collect time record forms and other products of the experience.	
Conduct summative assessment.	
Get feedback from all the partners.	
Celebrate accomplishments.	
<b>AFTER THE MODULE</b>	<b>✓</b>
Give recognition to the partners.	
Meet with the partners to evaluate results and plan needed revisions.	
Self-evaluate programme success and revise for the next implementation.	
Provide feedback to the service-learning/ community engagement office on campus.	
Write up your learning experiences and publish them.	