

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE-LEARNING

Note: This section of the Guide was contributed by JET Education Services and does not necessarily reflect the policies, views or practices of the HEQC.

The White Paper on Higher Education (1997) laid the foundations for making community engagement an integral and core part of higher education in South Africa. As already noted, the White Paper makes specific reference to the role of community engagement within the overarching task of transforming the higher education system. The White Paper urges HEIs to make their expertise and infrastructure available for community service programmes – in the interests of demonstrating social responsibility and a commitment to the common good. As we have seen, the following is also included as being one of the goals of higher education:

To promote and develop social responsibility and awareness amongst students of the role of higher education in social and economic development through community service programmes. (1997: 10)

The White Paper shows receptiveness to the growing interest in community service programmes for students, and provides in-principle support to “feasibility studies and pilot programmes which explore the potential of community service in higher education” (1997: 18).

The HEQC Founding Document (2001) has identified academically based community service – along with teaching and learning, and research – as one of the three areas for the quality assurance of higher education. The HEQC’s priorities with regard to service-learning are evident in both its *Criteria for Institutional Audits* (2004a) and *Criteria for Programme Accreditation* (2004b).³

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Since the release of the White Paper (1997), the debate on community engagement in South African higher education has sharpened its focus, defining community engagement not as one of the three silos of higher education along with teaching and research, but as an *integral* part of teaching and research – as a mechanism to infuse and enrich teaching and research with a deeper sense of context, locality and application. Along with this change in perception, the terminology used for community service has shifted from ‘community service’ to ‘academically based community service’, to ‘community engagement’ and to ‘scholarship of engagement’.

³ Refer to the earlier section of this Guide: THE SERVICE-LEARNING PRIORITIES OF THE HEQC.

In his renowned book, *Scholarship Reconsidered*, Ernest Boyer (1990) proposes four necessary and interrelated forms of scholarship that, together, amount to what is increasingly referred to as “scholarship of engagement” (Boyer, 1996). The first and most familiar element in Boyer’s model is termed “scholarship of discovery”. It closely resembles the notion of research and contributes to the total stock of human knowledge.

The second element is referred to as “scholarship of integration” and underscores the need for scholars to give meaning to their discovery by putting it in perspective and interpreting it in relation to other discoveries and forms of knowledge. This means making connections across disciplines and interpreting data in a larger intellectual and social context.

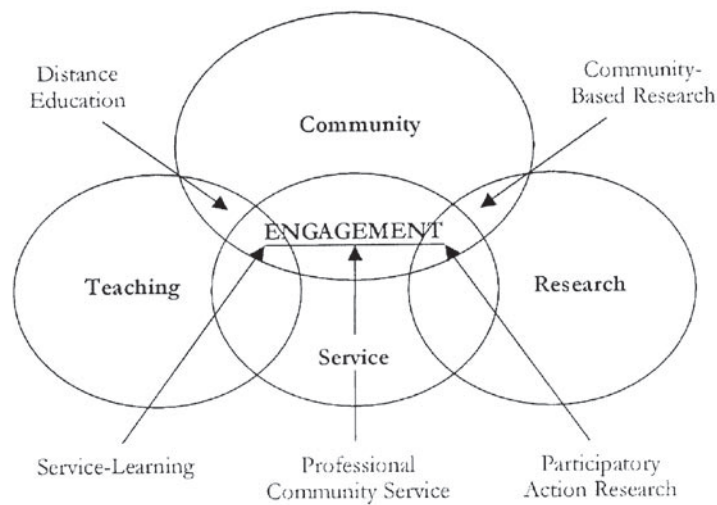
The third element is labelled “scholarship of application”. It makes us aware of the fact that knowledge is not produced in a linear fashion. The arrow of causality can, and frequently does, point in both directions; that is, theory leads to practice and practice leads to theory. Community engagement, viewed and practised as a scholarly activity, provides the context for a dialogue between theory and practice through reflection.

The final element in Boyer’s model is referred to as “scholarship of teaching”. Within the framework of a scholarship of engagement, the traditional roles of teacher and learner become somewhat blurred. What emerges is a learning community including community members, students, academic staff and service providers.

In the Glossary of the HEQC’s *Framework for Institutional Audits* (June 2004d: 15) ‘community engagement’ is defined as follows:

Initiatives and processes through which the expertise of the higher education institution in the areas of teaching and research are applied to address issues relevant to its community. Community engagement typically finds expression in a variety of forms, ranging from informal and relatively unstructured activities to formal and structured academic programmes addressed at particular community needs (service-learning programmes).

Consequently, it can be argued that community engagement, as a scholarly activity, is of critical importance both in shaping our students and future citizens and in producing knowledge that is the most relevant and useful to the South African context. Community engagement can take on many different forms and shapes within the context of higher education, as is illustrated in figure 1. These forms include distance education, community-based research, participatory action research, professional community service and service-learning. In its fullest sense, community engagement is the combination and integration of service with teaching and learning (e.g. service-learning), professional community service by academic staff and participatory action research applied simultaneously to identified community development priorities.



(Adapted from Bringle, Games and Malloy, 1999)

Figure 1: Types of Community Engagement

Ideally, the circles indicating Teaching and Research should overlap. In this way an overlapping nexus between Teaching/ Learning, Service and Research will be formed; this nexus will then be indicative of the field where there is full integration of the three core functions of higher education.

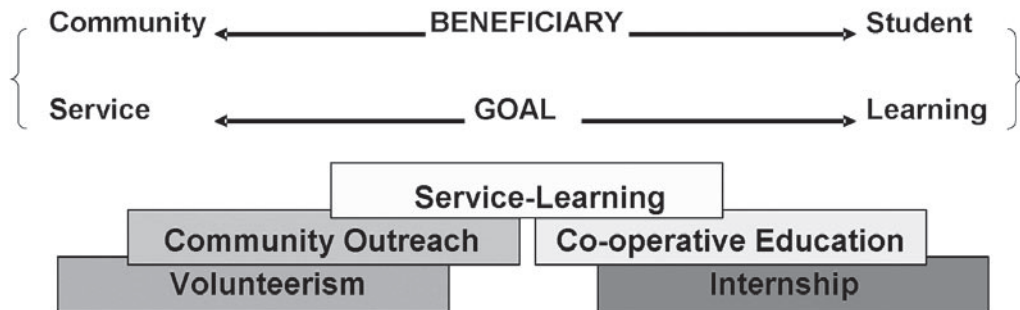
Although the main focus of this Guide is on service-learning, many of the recommendations and guidelines, particularly at the institutional and faculty levels, are applicable to other types of community engagement. For example, it is recommended that HEIs have an institution-wide policy on community engagement. It is anticipated, however, that these policies would be inclusive of, but not necessarily exclusive to, service-learning. For this reason, a wider look at all types of community engagement in the context of higher education is valid, in order to gain a better understanding of service-learning.

A TYPOLOGY OF STUDENT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Numerous terms and definitions are used to describe various forms of student community service (or engagement) in higher education. These forms may be placed on a continuum between two important distinctions, namely:

- the primary *beneficiaries* of the service (i.e. community or student); and
- the primary *goal* of the service (i.e. community service or student learning).

Figure 2 (below) identifies the various forms of student community engagement and places them on a continuum as explained.



(Adapted from Furco, 1996)

Figure 2: Distinctions among Student Community Engagement Programmes

It must be emphasised, however, that the above categories of community engagement are not necessarily discrete or mutually exclusive. For example, the boundaries between ‘volunteerism’ and ‘community outreach’; ‘internships’ and ‘co-operative education’; ‘community outreach’ and ‘service-learning’; and finally ‘co-operative education’ and ‘service-learning’ are often blurred, and programmes may shift one way or the other on this continuum. A characteristic common to all of the above forms of community engagement is that they all embrace a measure of experiential learning.

Volunteerism is an engagement of students in activities where the primary beneficiary is the recipient *community* and the primary goal is to provide a *service*. Volunteer programmes are essentially altruistic by nature. Although students may learn from these programmes, they are generally not related to, or integrated into, the student’s field of study. Volunteer programmes are thus essentially extra-curricular activities, taking place during holidays and outside tuition time. Students generally do not receive academic credit for participation in such programmes and they are generally funded by external donors and through student fundraising. Programmes are generally relatively small in scale and have a loose relationship with the HEI. In a context where the need is great, such programmes have a marginal role, in terms of both service and human resource development.

Community outreach is also an engagement of students in activities where the primary beneficiary is the recipient *community* and the primary goal is to provide a *service*. However, these programmes involve more structure and commitment from students and result to a larger extent than in the previous category in student learning. These programmes are generally initiated from within the HEI by a department or a faculty, or as an institution-wide initiative. In some cases recognition is given, either in the form of academic credit or in the form of research publications. As the service activities become more integrated with the academic coursework of the students, and as the student begins to engage in formal intellectual discourse about service issues, the programme moves closer to the centre of the continuum to become more

like service-learning. One of the main features distinguishing academically-based community outreach programmes from service-learning is that the former tends to be a distinct activity and initiative of the HEIs, whereas the latter is fully integrated into the curriculum. In other words, service-learning is not seen as an ‘outreach’ activity; it is seen as an integral and inseparable part of the higher education curriculum.

On the other extreme of the continuum (figure 2), **internships** engage students in activities where the primary beneficiary is the *student* and the primary goal is student *learning*. Internships are intended to provide students with hands-on practical experience that will enhance their understanding of their area of study, achieve their learning outcomes and provide them with vocational experience. Generally, internships are fully integrated with the student’s curriculum. Internships (also referred to as ‘clinical practice’ in some instances) are used extensively in many professional programmes such as Social Work, Medicine, Education, and Psychology.

Likewise, the primary beneficiary of **co-operative** education programmes is the *student* and the primary goal is student *learning*. Co-operative education provides students with co-curricular opportunities that are related to, but not always fully integrated with, the curriculum. The primary purpose of co-operative education is to enhance the students’ understanding of their area of study. Co-operative education is used extensively in universities of technology throughout South Africa. It should be stressed that the primary differences between co-operative education and service-learning lie not necessarily in differing methodologies but in the nature of student placements and the desired outcomes. Co-operative student placements are essentially within *industry* whereas service-learning placements are within *service agencies* or directly in the *community*. Whereas the desired outcome of co-operative education is essentially student learning, service-learning includes the additional goal of providing a service to the community. Nevertheless, in terms of student learning outcomes, both co-operative education and service-learning share the goal of enriching the students’ understanding of the course content and discipline.

Service-learning modules or courses engage students in activities where *both the community and student* are primary beneficiaries and where the primary goals are to provide a *service* to the community and, equally, to enhance student *learning* through rendering this service. Reciprocity is therefore a central characteristic of service-learning. The primary focus of programmes in this category is on integrating community service with scholarly activity such as student learning, teaching, and research. This form of community engagement is underpinned by the assumption that service is enriched through scholarly activity and that scholarly activity, particularly student learning, is enriched through service to the community. Unlike the other categories of community engagement described above, service-learning is entrenched in a discourse that proposes the development and transformation of higher education in relation to community needs. Terms often used for this form of community engagement are ‘service-learning’, ‘academic service-learning’, ‘academic community service’, and ‘community-based learning’.

SERVICE-LEARNING

While the above types of experiential learning include aspects of community engagement, some (i.e. volunteerism; community outreach) emphasise community service while others (i.e. internships; co-operative education) emphasise student learning. Service-learning represents a balanced approach to, and an integration of, community service and student learning.

There are numerous definitions of service-learning in the literature. One of the most commonly cited (Bringle and Hatcher, 2004: 127) defines the activity of service-learning as:

a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students:

- Participate in an organised service activity that meets identified community goals.
- 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.

In the Glossary of the HEQC's *Criteria for Institutional Audits* (HEQC, 2004a: 26) 'service learning' is defined as:

applied learning which is directed at specific community needs and is integrated into an academic programme and curriculum. It could be credit-bearing and assessed, and may or may not take place in a work environment.

Within the service-learning context, 'communities' refers to those specific, local, collective interest groups that participate in the service-learning activities of the institution. Such communities are regarded as partners (i.e. no longer as 'recipients'), who have a full say in the identification of service needs and development challenges. Such communities also: participate in defining the service-learning and development outcomes; identify the relevant assets that they have in place; evaluate the impact; and contribute substantially to the mutual search for sustainable solutions to challenges. In the South African context the members of such 'communities' will generally be disadvantaged, materially poor inhabitants of under-serviced urban, peri-urban or rural areas. In many instances these communities may be accessed most efficiently through service sector organisations such as government or state departments, as well as non-governmental, community-based or faith-based organisations.

The field of experiential education is the pedagogical foundation of service-learning. To ensure that service promotes substantive learning, service-learning connects students' experience to reflection and analysis in the curriculum (Duley, 1981). Service-learning points to the importance of contact with complex, contemporary social problems and efforts to solve them as an important element of a complete education. It invokes the theories of Bandura (1977), Coleman (1977), Dewey (1963), Freire (1970, 1973), Kolb (1984), Argyris and Schön (1978), Resnick (1987), Schön (1983, 1987) and others to explain its pedagogical foundations and practice. As Dewey states, this process at least results in a 'reconstruction' of experience (as in the formulation of the Newtonian laws of motion, or in Einstein's reformulation), a

recodifying of habits (as in overcoming racial bias), and an ongoing questioning of old ideas (a habit of learning experientially). Thus experiential learning so pursued transforms students, helps them revise and enlarge knowledge, and alters their practice. It affects the aesthetic and ethical commitments of individuals and alters their perceptions and their interpretations of the world (Keeton, 1983). With this pedagogy, community engagement and academic excellence are “not competitive demands to be balanced through discipline and personal sacrifice [by students], but rather [...] interdependent dimensions of good intellectual work” (Wagner, 1986: 17). The pedagogical challenge is “devising ways to connect study and service so that the disciplines illuminate and inform experience and experience lends meaning and energy to the disciplines” (Eskow, 1979: 21).

Taking its cue from the White Paper’s call for feasibility studies and pilot programmes to explore the potential of community engagement in higher education, JET has, over the past four years, supported the development, monitoring, evaluation and research of 182 credit-bearing courses that incorporate the principles and practice of service-learning (see table 1, below). Collectively, these courses included 39 different academic disciplines and almost 7 000 students ranging from first year to Master’s level (see table 2, below). The purpose of this research was to generate data that would inform higher education policy and practice at the national, institutional and programmatic levels. The recommendations presented in this Guide were generated through the above research process. Emerging from both JET’s research on service-learning and the international literature, the following *key principles and practices* have been identified as critical to the success of community engagement through service-learning.

Factors considered critical at an **institutional level** are:

- *Mission statement*: Are community engagement and service-learning as an integral part of teaching and research included in the institution’s mission statement?
- *Institutional policies*: Does the institution have a policy regarding its commitment to community engagement? Do its staff promotion and reward policies encourage community engagement?
- *Institutional strategies*: Does the institution have an explicit strategy to operationalise its mission statement and community engagement policies?
- *Partnerships*: Does the institution have established and collaborative working relationships with local and regional authorities, non-governmental and governmental service agencies and civic organisations? These partnerships provide the potential for an overarching framework and strategy for community engagement and service-learning.
- *Notion of scholarship*: Does the institution recognise community engagement as a scholarly activity contributing towards teaching, research and the production of knowledge?
- *Allocation of resources*: Does the institution allocate resources such as physical space, human resources and operating costs to the implementation of its community engagement strategy?

- *Enabling mechanisms:* Has the institution established mechanisms to facilitate the implementation of its community engagement strategy and to assist academic staff to include the principles and practice of service-learning in academic programmes? Generally these enabling mechanisms may include an office with personnel dedicated to the implementation of the institution’s community engagement strategy and the support of academic staff.

**Table 1:
Courses participating in JET’s research**

DISCIPLINE	NUMBER OF COURSES
Agriculture	14
Architecture	6
Economic Sciences	11
Education	26
Engineering	7
Health Sciences	36
Human Sciences	62
Law	7
Natural Sciences	12
TOTAL	181

**Table 2:
Number and level of students participating in JET’s research**

STUDENT LEVEL	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
1st year	1 577
2nd year	1 093
3rd year	1 599
4th year	2 238
Master’s	423
TOTAL	6 930

In JET’s experience of working with ten HEIs over the past few years the above criteria are critical to creating an institutional climate and context conducive to the implementation of community engagement as an integral part of teaching and learning. At a course (or module) level critical factors determining the success of service-learning include the following:

- *Reciprocity:* Is there reciprocity between those served and those who learn, that is, between communities and their needs for assistance, on the one hand, and HEIs and their desires to augment student learning and research on the other? Service-learning programmes should include and address both service and learning outcomes – that is, outcomes to be achieved with regard to the community and with regard to the students.
- *Collaboration:* Is the course designed, implemented and assessed collaboratively with the participating community and service agencies? Collaboration and the development of partnerships are critical to the success and sustainability of service-learning.
- *Needs assessment:* Is the course informed by an assessment of community needs? It is important that the service objectives of the course are aligned with the needs expressed by the participating community. A community needs assessment is often built into the course design as one of the first student tasks. The community needs assessment introduces students to some basic research principles and provides the students with an opportunity to build relationships in the community before the implementation of an intervention/ service.

- *Alignment of service and learning goals:* In order for effective service and learning to be achieved, alignment between service and learning goals is critical. Service can only inform learning and likewise learning can only inform service to the extent that these are aligned.
- *Student placements:* Is the student placement suited to the desired service and learning outcomes? Is there adequate and appropriate supervision for students at the site? Have those responsible for student supervision been adequately prepared, recognised and rewarded?
- *Student orientation:* Have students been adequately prepared for their community placement? Do they know what is expected when they arrive at their community placement?
- *Role clarification:* Are the roles and responsibilities of all participants (i.e. academic staff, students, community, and service agencies) explicit and clear to themselves and to others? Students should be adequately prepared for their community placement and the service they intend to provide.
- *Reflection:* Has adequate time been set aside for structured critical reflection on the service experience and its illumination of the theory presented in the course? Structured reflection is a central and essential part of any course that includes service-learning. It is through critical reflection that service informs theory and theory informs service.
- *Logistics:* Have proper and effective arrangements been made with regard to the logistics of the course, including student timetables, transport etc.? Community placements often require extensive logistical arrangements.

The above criteria include some of the most important factors contributing to the successful implementation of community engagement through service-learning in South African higher education. These factors are unpacked further in the recommendations for good practice of service-learning presented in this Guide.