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Service Learning Faculty Handbook

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About Service Learning

What is Service Learning?

Service Learning is defined in a number of ways by a number of different institutions of higher learning. However, one of the best definitions comes from The Center for Public Policy and Service at Mesa Community College. That definition envisions service learning as

- a method under which students learn and develop through
- active participation in
- a thoughtfully organized service experience that
- meets actual community needs and is
- coordinated in collaboration with school and community, and
- integrated into academic curriculum;
- a method that provides structured time for reflection so students can think, talk and/or write about what they did and saw during their service;
- provides students with opportunities to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real life situations in the community;
- enhances what is taught in schools by extending learning beyond the classroom; and
- helps foster the development of a sense of caring for others.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the Service Learning Program (SLP) is to assist students in fulfilling Houston Community College's vision to be "the educational institution of choice for those who seek skilled training for the workforce, those who seek to upgrade their skills to enhance preparedness for economic opportunity, and those who seek lifelong learning opportunities to enhance their quality of life." The SLP also helps to realize the college's goal "to be an integral part of the economic and educational life of the community through quality partnerships and responsiveness to community needs."

Goals of the HCCS Service Learning Program

The goals of the Houston Community College Service Learning Program include the following:

- To offer HCCS student opportunities in service learning activities.
- To facilitate faculty participation in the development of curricula with service learning components.
- To support the efforts of the community surrounding the college to face current and future challenges.
- To maintain a pool of student volunteers for community outreach activities.
- To increase the recruitment and retention of students enrolled in HCCS programs.
- To enhance the intellectual and academic development of HCCS students.
- To prepare HCCS students to function in a culturally diverse environment.
- To build new and varied partnerships with the diverse members in the HCCS community.
- To build relationships with System, College, and Community service units.

BENEFITS OF SERVICE LEARNING

The virtue of service learning lies in the benefits that all involved participants receive. Faculty, students, and the College community profit by participating in service learning.

Benefits to Faculty

The most important professional responsibility faculty have, of course, is to teach. Service learning is an innovative teaching methodology that centers on course relevance based on student-directed learning. The faculty at Houston Community College benefits from strengthened community and volunteer efforts, especially from projects that link service and curriculum. Service learning enables faculty members to establish a concrete link between the classroom and their communities, and that enhances their own academic learning. In some cases, students who may not respond to traditional instruction techniques will respond to an applied learning approach that uses community and volunteer service.

Many financial resources are available to faculty for course development. Campus Compact and COOL, two service coordinating agencies, have new grant programs funded by the Ford Foundation to strengthen the link between service and curriculum. The Student Literacy Corps supports volunteer literacy projects that are curricular components of community college courses.

Benefits to Students

Benefits to the serving student range from enhanced self-esteem and a heightened sense of civic values, to improved career opportunities. Some of the gains that researchers have attributed to participation in service learning programs include:

- improved self-esteem,
- greater likelihood of staying in college,
- enhanced intellectual and academic development,
- enhanced career skills and opportunities,
- deepened sense of citizenship and humanitarian values,
- improved social skills,

- greater later life earnings and career development,
- greater sense of empowerment,
- enhanced leadership development, and
- better preparation to participate in a culturally diverse environment.

Many of these benefits relate directly to the stated goals and mission of Houston Community College. Students who enjoy strengthened intellectual development and college performance are better-educated students. Developing self-esteem and a sense of efficacy, staying in college and finding a career are precisely the outcomes colleges desire.

Benefits to the Community

A primary beneficiary of a Service Learning Program at Houston Community College should be the community. Critical challenges face the nation's communities today. Many of these issues are felt most strongly by people living in communities served by community colleges. It is not enough to educate students and then return them to their communities. Community colleges can help their students strengthen those communities. The impact of service learning is not limited to a student's time in school. After graduation, students will be more likely to volunteer and participate in community affairs for the rest of their adult lives. What lasts is not only the urge to serve but also a broader perspective grounded in experience. That experience will enable our students to make more informed personal, social, and political choices as citizens in a democracy.

Benefits to the College

Houston Community College benefits from new and strengthened ties to the community it serves. Service projects will provide opportunities to develop new partnerships, raise the visibility of the College, and present the institution in its best light as a College actively concerned about the welfare of community residents.

Increased visibility also has an impact on enrollment and retention. For example, HCC students who serve in a mentoring capacity at local high schools make more secondary students aware of Houston Community College as an educational option. In all likelihood, the high school students will develop a favorable opinion of Houston Community College. Evidence from research also suggests that community service also helps boost retention. Studies indicate students involved in service learning activities are more likely to stay in school.

Though no less significant, other benefits to the College are more difficult to measure. Colleges with service learning programs stand to gain a more positive self-image to go with their new spirit. The student body, faculty and administrators can realize a greater sense of identity. Not only is the individual affected but also the other students and the whole campus. A service learning student's newly developed skills for functioning in a multi-cultural environment, for example, do not end with the service project but extend into his or her daily exchanges with peers on campus and on the job.

A college community service program may also generate new financial resources. If the College makes a commitment to organize the service component of campus life, it will find itself in a better position to take advantage of previously untapped funding opportunities. Such opportunities are currently expanding as a result of the passage of the National and Community Service Act of 1990.

Benefits to the Business Community

The business community's interest in service learning programs also constitutes a new opportunity for partnerships between businesses and colleges. Businesses want the visibility and positive reputation associated with service, and strong community college service programs can help businesses achieve those goals. Partnerships already exist between the College and the private sector. The Service Learning Program at Houston Community College enables students and corporate partners to have even more opportunities to achieve their respective goals.

STEPS IN DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING SERVICE LEARNING INTO YOUR COURSES

Integrating service learning into your courses can be relatively simple. A good place to start is to consider the steps below developed by the El Paso Community College Service Learning Program.

- 1. Brainstorm based on course objectives.** Think about the courses you teach and decide how service learning can help your students meet your course objectives. Remember that service learning can be an effective teaching strategy in **every discipline**. Brainstorm on how some course objectives can be met through a service-learning component. For example, in an Introduction to Health Occupations course, students can serve in a nursing home and learn about the various health professionals and their roles in that environment. You should not worry about the service learning success of your course(s) at this point. For now, simply try to make a connection between your course(s) and what service

opportunities might be available. **Students must make a connection between their service at the partner site and your course objectives.**

2. **Select partnership sites.** Identify the community entities that offer experiences related to your course. Obtain a copy of the Service Learning Partnership sites from the Service Learning representative. Read through the agency descriptions. Your students may also read these descriptions and offer helpful suggestions. The Service Learning Program Representative may assist you on this task as well. Then, based on the information gathered, select the best choice(s) for your students. If you wish to contact the Partnership Site agency(ies), introduce yourself, and if possible, establish a working relationship with them for ongoing support and monitoring.
3. **Determine service learning objectives for your course.** List a couple of specific and measurable service learning goals and objectives. Clearly define these objectives. Consider your goals and purpose in using service learning, while keeping the partner sites you have selected in mind. What will be the benefits to the students, you, and the community? Review your course objectives to determine which can be related to community service.
4. **Choose a course service option.** Based upon your purpose, goals, and objectives, decide how service learning will be incorporated into your course(s). How much weight will you give it on your grade scale? **Remember:** Service Learning may be given to students as an option; it does not have to be required. You may offer the service learning option as an alternative to a research paper, a required assignment, a quiz, an exam, or even as an extra-credit assignment. It is solely up to you to determine what the option will be. However, service learning should not be done in lieu of a comprehensive final exam. In addition, students should serve a minimum of **twenty hours** in a semester. Also, service at the partnership site **must** meet course objectives in order to receive service-learning credit. The twenty hours are in addition to any training or orientation hours required by the partnership site.
5. **Review and revise your course syllabus to reflect the service-learning component.** Some changes in your course syllabus may include the following: allocation of time for discussion of the experience even if all students do not participate, some readings that might link the service to specific course objectives, or class presentations from those who opted for the service learning component.

6. **Explain and promote.** Introduce the service learning option to your class on the first day of class. Discuss the benefits of this teaching and learning strategy. Make your commitment very clear and encourage students to take advantage of the opportunity for both personal and academic growth that service to the community can provide. Provide specifics on the locations, hours, and length of commitment of each service option. Invite facility representatives to speak to your class(es) to provide information about their needs. Distribute the Partnership Site Listings only to the students enrolling in the Service Learning Program. Make them aware that they should initiate contact with the agency and be placed in service by third week of the semester.

7. **Assist students in developing their own goals and objectives for service learning.** Work with students in developing their own specific service and learning objectives that connect with your own course objectives. Many students may turn in affective objectives. (To make me a better person, to help others, etc.) You must help them make the connection of service to specific course objectives. For example, in a technical writing course, the objective might be to develop or revise brochures for the YMCA. This activity may be done after the students have been oriented at their placement sites. This may give students a better idea of what kinds of service they will be doing. **Clarify what is expected of your students.**

8. **Teach students the skills of observation.** However, do not over prepare them for their service experience. They are better left alone to enjoy the adventure of self-discovery.

9. **Facilitate reflection activities for your students.** Connect the service experience to your academic course content by deliberate and guided reflection. Reflection is what combines the learning with the service. You cannot assume that learning will automatically result from experiential learning. You will serve as a facilitator in these reflection activities. Reflection can take the form of journals, analytic papers, dialogue, essays, class presentations, artwork, drama, etc. The key to effectiveness is structure and direction. You will find that whatever form of reflection activity you assign, the earlier the service learning experience is reviewed, the sooner you will be able to evaluate your students' understanding of the process. For your reflection activity, you should formulate questions related to the goals and objectives your students should be learning.

The Service Learning Program Directors are available to assist you in finding facilitators of large group "reflection sessions" at the end of the semester if the faculty so prefers. These reflection sessions are conducted through an interdisciplinary approach where students will not only reflect to their own classmates, but also share their experiences with other HCCS students and faculty. Reflection will refocus the students to purpose, goals, and objectives of their specific service and learning field.

Remember that written reflection is an effective approach to critical thinking and improves basic writing and communication skills. However, the dialogue or the reflective class session is a powerful tool and seemingly more effective. It provides students with the opportunity to showcase their experiences, exchange ideas, and share critical insights about the information learned.

10. Evaluate the outcomes of service learning, as you would with other academic performance. Students are being graded on your stated objectives. How well did your students meet your service learning and course objectives? The form of evaluation you use can be the same standard used in evaluating other course assignments, written or oral. **Ask Yourself:** Were the objectives accomplished by the students? Did they master the course material? Asking the students periodically to write a short essay or progress report on their satisfaction with this teaching strategy and their perceived accomplishments or progress can provide you with answers. For those of you who enjoy quantitative research, you can collect data on the number of people served and the number of service hours provided by your students.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Aside from being the instructor in the class, what responsibilities do I have?

A: Your role should be to ensure that course requirements are being met through the service learning experience. You should also make yourself available to students to assist with site selection, perhaps intervening when necessary to ensure their experience reinforces what is learned in class.

Q: Do the students have to meet certain requirements?

A: Some sites do require that students are a certain age, or that they possess needed knowledge and/or skills. Some sites even require fingerprinting and background checks. Others may ask students to sign Confidentiality Agreements.

Do not let your students or yourself be intimidated by these. Some of the best experiences occur at sites where these requirements are in place.

Q: What if a student and/or the facility are clearly unhappy with the project?

A: While rare, this may occur on occasion. This is why site selection, an understanding of student duties, and reporting requirements should be made clear at the beginning. Ask students to let you know if any of these change during the course of their service learning experience.

Q: Can I seek out facilities I know about or must I use those listed?

A: Any tax-exempt, non-profit organization or program is a qualified service-learning site. Many private corporations also conduct outreach activities that may prove to be a valuable experience to your students.

Q: Whom can I go to when problems arise?

A: Names and phone numbers of Service Learning Representatives are listed in the Service Learning Brochure. These are individuals who are currently involved with service learning at Houston Community College.

Q: Must I notify anyone about the results of service learning in my class, or the successes and failures of individual students?

A: While not required at this time, faculty are encouraged to submit a semesterly summary of their results. This will enable the College to better gauge the level of service learning activities as a System, and help identify faculty who may be interested in grant opportunities, student scholarships, and teaching awards.