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## **About Service Learning/Civic Engagement**

### **What is Service Learning?**

According to the *National Service Learning Clearinghouse* website,

Service Learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. They become actively contributing citizens and community members through the service they perform.

### **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 meet CCSSE (Community College Survey of Student Engagement) goal to “Participate in a community-based project as part of a regular course.”

## **Benefits of Service Learning**

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

1. Keeps courses fresh, new and exciting each semester
2. Creates deeper job satisfaction seeing growth in student awareness of the relationships between subject matter and their community
3. Strengthens community ties
4. Functions as a PEP goal

### **Benefits to Students**

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

1. Greater likelihood of completing schooling goals
  - Sees the direct correlation between societal needs/careers and degree requirements
  - Finds faculty and community mentors to encourage them and provide support
  - Experiences greater enjoyment from deeper understanding and application of subject matter
2. Builds stronger social and community opportunities
  - Provides opportunities to test out career options
  - Becomes more informed about societal needs/issues
  - Influences future decisions to continue volunteering
3. Designation for Service Learning on transcript
  - Enhances scholarship and transfer application
  - Shows societal concern/engagement on job applications
  - Potentially transitions to university internships

4. Strengthens students' skill sets
  - Increased sense of self-efficacy as young people learn that they can impact real-world challenges
  - Enhanced problem-solving skills , ability to work in teams, and planning abilities

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 a sense of efficacy, staying in college and finding a career are precisely the outcomes HCC desires.

## **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 for the community include the following:

1. Reinforces partnerships
2. Fosters an informed, civic minded student population regarding community needs
3. Furnishes a youthful perspective and innovative talent
4. Develops and trains potential employees
5. Supplies a diverse pool of volunteers
6. Provides college role models for client populations.

## Steps in Developing and Implementing Service Learning into College 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 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, a student 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 or use the list of Approved HCC Contact Sites.
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 for the 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 only be given to students as an option; it cannot 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 opportunity. However, service learning should not be done in lieu of a comprehensive final. In addition, students are required to serve a minimum of fifteen hours in a semester in order to receive the transcript designation. Also, service at the partnership site must meet course objectives in order to receive service learning credit. The fifteen hours are in addition to any training or orientation hours required by the partnership site. Less than fifteen hours are allowed, but will not result in the transcript designation, only an assignment grade for the course.
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 options. Invite facility representatives to speak

to your class(es) and provide information about their needs. Distribute the Partnership Site Listings to the students who want to participate in the Service Learning Program. Make them aware that they should initiate contact with the agency and be placed in service in a timely manner, so that they can complete their hours by the end 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 learning objectives that connect with your own course objective. 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 student's understanding of the process. For your reflection activity, you should formulate questions related to the goals and objectives your students should be learning.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Question:** Is Service Learning applicable in all disciplines?

**Answer:** Yes. Service Learning can be used to address or enhance course objectives in any discipline.

**Question:** Does Service Learning require change or modification of course objectives?

**Answer:** No. Service Learning is a pedagogy used to achieve existing course objectives.

**Question:** May service be performed with an organization not HCC's Service Learning Agency list?

**Answer:** Yes, but this decision should be made in consultation with the student's instructor in advance of beginning service.

**Question:** May students do service at a faith-based organization?

**Answer:** Yes, under certain circumstances. HCC is a public institution. This means that service for a faith-based organization is acceptable as long as the service does not involve proselytizing or otherwise promulgating the views of the faith. For example, students may work in a thrift shop or soup kitchen run by a religious organization so long as their service does not involve trying to encourage those who are served to accept the views of, or join, the organization.

**Question:** Do the students have to meet certain requirements?

**Answer:** Some agencies/organizations do require that students are a certain age, that they possess needed skills, require fingerprinting and background checks, or ask students to sign confidentiality agreements. Do not let your students be intimidated by these as service at these can be rewarding. Discuss the reasons, i.e. a woman's shelter may require confidentiality and schools are legally bound to perform background checks for people who work with children.

**Question:** Do students have to complete all of their service hours for the semester at one organization?

**Answer:** No, they do not. If it is acceptable to the instructor and to the organizations, service hours may be performed at two or more organizations in a single semester.

**Question:** Is student reflection required?

**Answer:** Yes. Reflection allows students to integrate their service experiences with course content. It allows faculty to evaluate student learning and provide feedback to their students. Reflection can take many forms, i.e. journals, papers linking course content and service, oral presentations.

**Question:** How many hours of service must be performed to earn the Service Learning designation on a student's transcript?

**Answer:** The minimum number of hours required during the course of a semester is 15.

**Question:** How do students go about getting the Service Learning designation on their transcripts?

**Answer:** At the end of the semester, once the hours have been completed and the organization has certified them to the instructor, the instructor must email the student's name, student ID#, the course and course number, the name of the organization, and the number of hours completed, to the College Director of Service Learning.