



The Impact of Service-Learning as a Class Text

“Service-learning enables students to do real work with real people in real time with real consequences.”

--UM student

Have you ever wondered whether the texts and projects you assign in the courses you teach are the most effective in meeting your course objectives? Does your syllabus grab and hold students’ interest? Do you worry about whether your students are really “getting it”? Are you looking for experiences or activities that encourage critical thought?

If your answer was ‘yes’ to any of the above, you might want to consider the use of service-learning in your class. Service-learning combines service that meets human and community needs with structured opportunities for learning. This form of experiential education can contribute dramatically to a student’s personal and social development, create a strong positive change in the greater community and its organizations, and impact significantly a student’s academic understanding, career growth, and sense of civic responsibility. While service-learning is not suitable for every course, it can be used in virtually every discipline. For example, in UM service-learning courses, students have:

- acquired valuable computer and marketing skills by developing databases and marketing plans for non-profit agencies
- applied engineering principles by designing and building mechanical devices to assist people with disabilities

- learned about molecular structures of organic compounds by teaching basic biochemistry to middle-school students
- appreciated how language learners master verb conjugations by teaching English as a second language.
- When used thoughtfully and intentionally, service-learning:
 - engages students in active learning
 - integrates disciplinary theory and knowledge with practice
 - deepens understanding of the complex root causes of social problems
 - creates new knowledge.

Does this all sound intriguing? If so, you should consider service-learning as a “text” for a course you are teaching or planning. Although not a text in the sense of something that has already been written, the service-learning text is actually “written” simultaneously with the course. Just as you would choose an appropriate ‘text’ based on desired learning outcomes so should service-learning experiences be chosen. A class service-learning experience should provide opportunities for stimulating class discussions and reflection not unlike using a ‘text’ for the same purpose. As you ponder possible service-learning opportunities for your class, decisions to consider include:

- Choosing the appropriate project that will achieve the learning objectives
- Selecting the right format for the service project such as making it part of the course requirements, making it an alternative to another assignment, or even creating an additional, optional fourth credit option.

- Defining if the project will be a one-time experience or on-going throughout the course
- Just as with any experiential education opportunity, choosing the right classroom activities that will encourage critical thought and help students learn through their experiences

The Office of Community Service-Learning stands ready to assist you in finding the right decisions and helping developing and implementing service-learning in your class. Our mission includes providing services, resources, and support to faculty interested in developing service-learning courses. Among the resources we provide are:

- On-line faculty handbook for service-learning
- Individual and departmental consultation
- Library of service-learning opportunities
- Workshops and training opportunities
- Undergraduate Teaching Assistants for service-learning
- Instructional improvement grant in association with CTE
- Special outreach and support for learning communities
- Ongoing survey of students in service-learning courses

We look forward to working with *you*! For more information on service-learning, please contact the Office of Community Service-Learning (301) 314-2273 or terpservice@umd.edu.