

Ten Principles of Good Practice in Community Service Learning and Pedagogy

Principles by J. Howard; text modified

- 1. Academic credit is for learning, not for service*

Students earn academic credit by demonstrating they have learned course content and skills. This is no different in community service learning courses. Academic credit is not awarded for doing service or for the quality of service, but rather for the student's demonstration of academic and civic learning.
- 2. Academic Rigor is uncompromised*

A community service assignment can be a new requirement, replace another requirement, or recognized by additional credit, but it should not lower academic learning expectations. Adding a service component, in fact, may enhance the rigor of a course because, in addition to having mastered the academic material, students must also learn from community experience.
- 3. Setting learning goals for students*

All courses should have clearly defined learning objectives for which students are accountable. However, it is especially necessary and advantageous to establish clear learning objectives in service-learning courses. The addition of the community as a learning context multiplies the learning possibilities. Deliberate planning of course academic *and* civic learning objectives is necessary for students to prioritize their learning and to leverage the bounty of learning opportunities offered by community service experiences.
- 4. Establish criteria for the selection of community service placement*

Four essential criteria exist in all service-learning courses. First, the range of acceptable service placements must relate to the content of the course. Second, the duration of service must be sufficient to enable the fulfillment of learning goals. Third, specific service activities and service contexts must have the potential to stimulate course-relevant learning. Fourth, community projects must meet real need in the community as determined by the community.
- 5. Provide educationally sound mechanisms to harvest the community learning*

Learning in any course is achieved by an appropriate mix of learning strategies and assignments that correspond to the learning objectives. In service-learning courses, learning strategies must be employed that support learning from service experiences and enable its use toward meeting course learning objectives. Learning interventions that promote critical reflection, analysis, and application of service experiences enable learning.

6. *Prepare students for learning from the community*

Most students lack experience extracting and making meaning from experience, let alone merging it with other academic and civic course learning strategies. Instructors can support students' learning through service by providing opportunities to acquire skills for gleaned the learning from the service context (e.g., participant-observer skills), and/or examples of how to successfully complete assignments (e.g., making available exemplary papers and reflection journals from previous courses to current students).

7. *Minimize the distinction between the students' community learning role and classroom learning role*

Classrooms and communities require students to assume different learner roles. If students are passive learners in the classroom and active learners in the community, the contrast may challenge and even impede student learning. The solution is to reshape the traditional classroom to value students as active learners.

8. *Rethink the faculty instructional role*

Commensurate with the preceding principle's recommendation for active student learning, this principle advocates that service-learning instructors also rethink their roles. An instructor role that would be most compatible with an active student role shifts away from a singular reliance on transmission of knowledge and toward mixed pedagogical methods that include learning facilitation and guidance.

9. *Be prepared for variation in, and some loss of control with, student learning outcomes*

In traditional courses, the learning strategies are constant for all enrolled students and under the watchful eye of the faculty member. In service-learning courses, given variability in service experiences and their influential role in student learning, one can anticipate greater heterogeneity in student learning outcomes and compromises to faculty control. Even when service-learning students are exposed to the same presentations and the same readings, instructors can expect that classroom discussions will be less predictable and the content of student papers/projects less homogeneous than in courses without a service assignment.

10. *Maximize the community responsibility orientation of the course*

Designing classroom norms and learning strategies that not only enhance academic learning but also encourage civic learning are essential to purposeful civic learning. While most traditional courses are organized for private learning that advances the individual student, service-learning instructors should consider employing learning strategies that will complement and reinforce the civic lessons from the community experience.

Compiled from:

1) Howard, J. (1993). Community service learning in the curriculum. In J. Howard (Ed.), *Praxis 1: A faculty casebook on community service learning* (pp. 3-12). Ann Arbor: OCSL Press.

2) Howard, J. (2001). Principles of good practice for service-learning pedagogy. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, Summer 2001, Page 16-19.*