

Critical Components of Community Service and Service Learning

For service-related activities to be mutually beneficial for both campus and community, they should reflect the following standards of best practices in philosophy and program management.¹

PHILOSOPHY COMPONENTS:

Reciprocity: Reciprocity is the belief that both the academy and the community have something to gain from each other. Each individual involved functions as both a teacher and learner. Community service participants are viewed as colleagues, not as servers and clients; and are acknowledged as partners in teaching and learning. Students work with, rather than do for the community.

Stakeholder Voice: The service provided must address a real need as identified by the community. In community service projects the voice of the community is sought and listened to as projects are developed. Assessing need should include a map of assets, not just deficits. At the same time, service activities must ensure that the needs of students are included in the development of the programs/placements.

Collaboration: Community service requires a special tri-partite partnership between students, faculty and the community. Service expectations and learning objectives are mutually determined and clearly defined. It is a process of engaging partners to work together, sharing authority and resources to help each other reach their goals.

Communication: This complex relationship between the college or university, its students, and the community that surrounds it can often be shifting and delicate. By requiring regular and ongoing communication, community service strengthens the whole and each part.

Accountability: The goals and objectives of students' service projects are clearly defined and each partner's roles and responsibilities are clarified.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT COMPONENTS

Orientation, Training, and Supervision: Faculty and community partners provide students with information about the CBO or agency and its patrons prior to their community service. In addition, students receive ongoing educational training to digest how their service can be most effective given the social, political, and economic context of their service work.

Meaningful Service: Service activities should be necessary and valuable to the community itself. This type of actions benefits both the community and student in that both feel that the service makes a difference in a measurable way and is a productive use of time and resources. Students should participate in activities that go beyond just doing good for someone, the activity should promote the dignity and growth of the giver and receiver.

Reflection: The student experience is deliberately designed and structured with reflection and formal analysis typically associated with academic discourse to ground student in the social realities of the wider community. Connected to course and program goals, reflection is continuous, challenging and contextualized, ensuring integration of service experiences with academic content.

Recognition and Celebration: Celebration involves peer, self-recognition, and a community acknowledgement of one's time, energy, and efforts. Celebration and Recognition should be done in a way that promotes a unified approach to confronting social issues and developing community between and among participants.

Assessment: Regular and continuing evaluations are conducted to assess both community impact and student development; to provide feedback loops between the academy and community partners; and to improve the content of training and reflection sessions.

¹ Adapted from *Establishing and Sustaining an Office of Community Service*; Torres, Jan (editor); Campus Compact, 2000