Building Competence, Critical-Thinking and Compassion through Service Learning Assignments

Theresa McDevitt. IUP libraries
2016 Information Literacy Summit
Penn State Libraries

Image source:
http://facdevblog.niu.edu/service-learning
Objectives

- Participants will:
  - Define service learning and list the benefits that may arise from the use of this practice and their connection to High Impact Practices
  - Consider the appropriateness of service learning assignments to their teaching settings
  - Share their experiences with using service learning assignments
  - Brainstorm service learning based assignments appropriate for various levels of students based on the needs of community partners and plan a next step for getting started after the session

- Why did you come? What were you hoping to hear about and discuss?
Service Learning and Education

- “Service learning is now part of the permanent landscape of higher education” (O’Meara, 2011, p.181.)
- Service learning is considered a High Impact Practice that supports student success and retention
- Incorporating service-learning into K-12 schools is a growing area of interest to educators. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016)
- It is variously defined. How would you define it?
For this session Service Learning is...

- A form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs, together with structured opportunities for reflection designed to achieve desired learning outcomes (Jacoby, 1996)

- Essential elements:
  - Some related learning or instruction (great when service learning is related to a specific class or a major, but some define community based research and project development as service learning. It can also be transformational)
  - Project or experience which requires application of theoretical knowledge or learning to address a community need
  - Opportunity to reflect upon the experience (preferably before, during, and after)
  - Some mutual benefit to the student and community served
High Impact Practices

- Service learning as distinct from volunteerism:
  “the idea is to give students direction experience with issues they are
  studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve the
  problems of the community. A key element in these programs is the
  opportunity students have to both apply what they are learning in real-
  world settings and reflect in a classroom setting on their service
  experiences.” (Kuh 2008, p.11)
Benefits

- An experiential learning pedagogy that balances the needs of students and community members involved, links the service and learning through reflective processes, and if skillfully managed leads to positive student personal, social or citizenship, career and intellectual benefits.” (Eyler, 2002)

- Jacoby argues it can: (2015, xiii)
  - Transform or reinvigorate teaching in colleges and universities
  - Enhance student’s academic learning
  - Address social ills
  - Instill social responsibility
Relevant, Empowering, and Opportunity for Career Exploration

- Linking information literacy skills to real life work situation
  - Finding evidence based resolutions for community partner’s real issues demonstrates the value of information literacy skills and motivates students to take information literacy instruction seriously

- Empowering
  - When students recognize that they can use what they have learned to help others they are empowered

- Career exploration
  - Experiences can assist students in career choice and job searching
Compassion and Citizenship

- “When the heart is touched by direct experience, the mind may be challenged to change” (Kolvenbach, 2000)

- Service learning can:
  - guide students to grow in compassion
  - increase their awareness and understanding of social problems
  - instill a commitment to making the world a better place (Bernacki & Jaeger, 2008;
Critical thinking and reflection

- May enhance critical thinking skills:
  - “Service learning is highly reflective and where course and community service are well-integrated, has an impact on the quality of students thinking and problem solving.” (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p.127)

- McCook definition of service learning related to librarianship centers on reflection. (Roy, Jensen & Meyers, 2009, 5)
  1. A faculty supervisor/mentor who is a reflective being.
  2. A placement that is an opportunity for reflection through work that is being done and interaction with other workers.
  3. The student’s preparation to encounter the service opportunity in a reflective manner and the student’s post-experience assessment of the placement.
Libraries and Service Learning Links

Library related training and practice
- Helping others is central to all librarians do
- Librarian professional training has a long tradition of hands-on teaching practices
- Libraries and librarians routinely assist users in finding evidence based answers to problems.
- Library (IL) related skills can enhance efforts to discover creative (evidence based) responses to issues faced by community partners

Service Learning Instruction and Practice
- Service to the community is central
- Apply curriculum/theoretical learning to real world problems
- Applying information literacy skills to community problems demonstrates to students the value of such skills in solving problems
Libraries as Service Learning Centers

- Service organizations
- Are often academic, cultural, and social centers of communities, schools and universities
- Often have missions calling upon them to serve the broader community outside the library and have roots in the community
- Already have close relationships with teaching faculty and help with faculty curriculum development
- Information literacy and library instruction lends itself to assisting in the development of any project that is evidence based (Westney, 2006.)
Case Study: Community Researcher Assignment for Credit Library Class

- Community Researcher assignment
- Student choose a community partner and a topic
  - One credit version - LIBR 151: Introduction to Information Literacy
    - Students receive a list of community partners and topics the partners wish to have explored
    - Assignment is a research portfolio on the topics provided by partners
    - Final class discussion calls upon students to present their findings and reflections on the process to entire group
  - Two credit version –LIBR 251-Information Access in the Digital Age
    - Community partners visit and introduce their organizations, its work, and projects
    - Students make visits to the community partner site
    - Assignments – various projects and an annotated bibliography and reflection
    - Community partners are invited to final class for presentations on findings and reflections on the process
Sample Projects
Student Reflections

Image source: https://themountainschool.wordpress.com/category/student-reflections/
Barry (2011) at Wayne State University was dismayed at students lack of engagement with her EDT 110 class. Inspired by a faculty colleague who already used such techniques, she and her co-instructor worked with a reworked the course around a service learning experience.

She worked with Children’s Hunger Alliance (CHA) to create topics students would investigate.

Topics were things CHA was interested, but focused enough for students in a 2 credit non-majors course to do in the course of the semester.

Assignment:
- Bibliography of 25-50 citations
- Service experience with CHA
- Reflection at beginning and end
- Final discussion with Office of Service Learning Representative and CHA representative

Positive student reactions and met University’s mission of “engaging in significant community service.”
Librarian English professor team at George Washington University asked students in Writing 20 to volunteer at local non-profit organizations and asked students to do two related research assignments:

- Do research to produce a brief overview of the organization, the neighborhood it works in, and the issues the organization addresses.
- “A research analysis where students are asked to take an aspect of their work with a community organization and enter an academic conversation around a particular issue.”

Increased motivation, use of numerical data and primary resources, and increased knowledge in approaching and limiting topics, and the potential for bias. (Nutefall, 2009).
Marketing

- Students in a two semester class focusing on real-world marketing issues look at the challenge of how to best promote reference services to students. (Duke, McDonald, and Trimble)

- Students in an Public Relations class visit a public library and come up with a plan (with proper citation and references) to publicize it, reflect on what it does and who it serves, how they feel about helping them

- Students in English class write entries for the library newsletter

- Students in English and Public Relations classes make short videos to promote the library
Instruction

- Technical communications students at Eastern Washington University learn about RefWorks, plan a lesson, and promote the tool. (Meyer & Miller, 2008)

- Graduate instructional design students (Yelinek and Michael Coffta, 2013) used interns from the Instructional Technology (MSIT) degree program to create high quality instructional videos that met library and students’ needs. Students reported they learned a tremendous amount about library research and resources during the internship that would help in their professional life.
Environmental Studies Senior Seminar

- Librarian at Illinois Wesleyan University embedded in a “Creating a Sustainable Society” service learning class.
- Created in response to grant to develop High Impact Practice assignments. The librarian was a liaison to environmental studies and worked a professor in the discipline to develop a service learning senior seminar
- Students choose an environmental project, find a community partner interested in the project, design the project in collaboration with partner, conduct the research, and offer policy proposal (Sweet, 2013)
- Librarian (Christopher Sweet) reported:
  - “embedding in this course was the single most meaningful teaching experience in my academic career as an academic librarian. I observed students apply research to solve local sustainability problems. I also built rapport with students far beyond the normal one- or two-shot library instruction sessions.” (p. 267)
More examples

- Roy, Jensen, and Myers (2009) list a variety of service learning assignments used in graduate education that can be adapted:
  - Community Library Projects
    - Paseo Boricua Community Literacy Project – students work with youth and community leaders to create learning activities, information resources, and digital media for underprivileged
    - Booker T. Washington After School Program. Lis students provide homework and literacy help and digital enrichment activities
    - Korean Cultural Center. Korean graduate LIS students worked with Korean immigrant community to respond to communities’ informational and resource needs
Connecting with Community Partners (Discussion)

- How I did it?
- How you have done it?
Connecting with Instructors (Discussion)

- How I did it?
- How you have done it?
People to Help You Connect and Prepare at Your Institution (Discussion)

- Who I contacted
- Who you contacted?
Getting Started

- Seek assistance and possible collaborative opportunities from colleagues and offices who are interested in/committed to service learning at your institution
- Offices of Service Learning
- Instructors who are already using service learning in their teaching
- Stress the importance of service and the multifold benefits of service learning to anyone who will listen:
  - Your students
  - Your colleagues
  - Administrators (add library value)
- Include reflection and ways students can share reflections and project outcomes
Getting Ready for Service Learning

- Small group activity
  - Find one or two others
  - Discuss guided questions on the (as much as possible) the Getting Ready for Service Learning activity sheet for 15 minutes,

- Large group sharing
Discussion

Next Step?

Image source: https://selflovewarrior.com/2014/10/01/october-self-love-diet-writing-prompt-take-that-one-next-step/


Duke, McDonald, and Trimble Collaboration between marketing students and the Library: An experiential learning project to promote reference services. College and Research Libraries


More Resources


