

WVU Service-Learning Syllabus Guidelines

Introduction

This guide is intended as a resource for developing the syllabus of a course that will include a community engagement experience, or for updating an existing syllabus when adding community engagement. It provides information about best practices in communicating to students about service-learning. For information on how to designate a service course and resources available to support community engagement in your course see our [S Designation Overview](#). This guide should complement the [Teaching and Learning Commons Syllabus Builder](#) and service-learning syllabi must still meet all other WVU syllabus guidelines.

Service-Learning Statement

Service-learning courses should include a statement within their course descriptions indicating that the course is a service-learning course and explaining how the service ties into the course content. This statement serves the purpose of communicating clearly and directly to the students that this is a course requiring experiences in the community.

Examples:

- *This service-learning course has been designed to provoke deeper engagement and critical thinking on relevant topics in organizational communication, while applying these to volunteer work at local non-profits. This class utilizes a critical lens to explore, challenge, and problematize communication in superior/subordinate and peer relationships and key contexts through the application of communication theory to complex organizations and organizational environments. The service learning component allows students to engage in social justice work and practice applying course concepts and theoretical principles while contributing to the well-being of the local community.**
- *Service-learning is an integral part of the introductory pharmacy practice experiences, as students learn about the mutual relationship that exists between service and learning. By completing hands-on service-learning activities in various settings in the community, students gain valuable skills that can only be reinforced outside of the classroom. Students will have the opportunity to develop verbal and written communication skills as well as the opportunity to interact with diverse populations in the community.**

Learning Outcomes

Service-learning has been identified as a high-impact educational practice shown to improve student retention and engagement by “giving students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in 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, G.D., 2008)

Students consistently report better experiences when their service is directly tied to the course content; this helps students to recognize the value of their time spent out of the classroom.

Intentional service tied to specific learning outcomes is a defining characteristic of service-learning. The following learning outcome guidelines will ensure that service-learning courses meet civic education goals as well as connect service activities to learning.

To enable the assessment of service-learning at WVU, we request that all designated service-learning courses incorporate the following learning outcome. If needed, the outcome may be tailored to fit your discipline.

- “Students will examine how societal, cultural or environmental issues impact community challenges or societal problems through collaboration with community towards shared goals.”

To more clearly indicate how students will be learning through service, include at least one service-learning outcome that includes the service activity as a how. This will be a discipline specific outcome that connects service activities as a means of achievement.

Examples:

- *Students will integrate knowledge from class material, the primary literature, and discussions to communicate immunology to the general public.**
- *Students will develop written communication skills through weekly reports, reflections, and final project summary submissions.**
- *Students will identify key characteristics of rural populations and apply them through delivery of health services in rural communities.**

Assessment

For the purpose of assessment of service-learning at WVU, we request that all designated service-learning include the following SEI question.

- “The service experience of this course helped me understand how this academic discipline can impact societal challenges.”

Reflection

Reflection is a critical component of service-learning that guides your students in connecting the experiences they have in the community with course concepts. Best practice indicates that academic credit is for learning, not for service, therefore it is the **learning through service** that must be evaluated more so than the service itself. Reflection assignments are an excellent tool for assessing learning that took place outside of the classroom.

Describe how reflection will be built into your course. This may take the form of reflective essays, structured class discussions or more discipline specific assignments that require critical thinking and lead students through the process of analyzing their experiences for learning. Your syllabus should clearly explain which assignments will incorporate this reflection and how they will be assessed.

Examples:

- *Individually, students will compose three reflections throughout the semester based on their experiences completing this community outreach project. Reflective writing is an important component of service-learning and allows students to understand the connection of the community outreach project to their coursework and future careers.**
- *Prompts will be posted on eCampus to allow students to reflect on their service, collaborate, exchange strategies, and share experiences throughout the semester.**

References

Ballard, S. M., & Elmore, B. (2009). A Labor of Love: Constructing a Service-Learning Syllabus. *Journal of Effective Teaching*, 9(3), 70-76.

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

Kuh, G. D. (2008). Excerpt from high-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter. *Association of American Colleges and Universities*, 19-34. <https://www.aacu.org/leap/hips>

*Syllabi examples were pulled from previously designated service-learning courses

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