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For further information on service-learning:

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Who Needs This Booklet?

This booklet is a soup-to-nuts guide for anyone who would like to implement service-learning in their classrooms in a way that will make the experience relevant and meaningful for their students. In particular, it walks you through the process of creating, implementing, and assessing a **student-driven service-learning project** that meets the needs of everyone involved. It is intended to help professors of both traditional and developmental courses use service-learning to overcome – not just cope with – the difficulties inherent in many classrooms by giving the students a lot of control over the project. Using this model of service-learning, professor and students become partners in the process of education.

Rather than imposing the project, pre-generated and developed, on the students, the professor and the students work together to design a project that will both meet the professor's learning goals and engage the students in the process of learning. While many of the specific examples are drawn from using service-learning in a composition classroom (since that is what I teach), the guide itself is not discipline specific, and I have endeavored to provide as many non-composition examples as possible.

Throughout the guide, I have tried to take into consideration both professors who are new to service-learning and those who are veterans of it. Even if you have been doing service-learning for years, you might find the student-professor partnership techniques advocated in this booklet to be useful. The goal in all cases is student learning, and what better way to accomplish that than to put the students at the center of their own learning activities?

If you are totally new to service-learning as a concept, start with the first section, "What is Service-Learning?" This provides a description of what service-learning is and how it differs from stand-alone volunteerism. If you are already familiar with the basic concepts of service-learning, but aren't sure it is for you, start with the section titled "Why Use Service-Learning?" And for those of you who are veterans of service-learning generally, but who would like to create more meaningful, student-centered service-learning experiences, just flip straight to the "Rationale for a Student-Professor Partnership in Service-Learning" section.

What is Service-Learning?

In service-learning, students apply their academic skills and knowledge to address real-life needs in their own communities. Tasks have meaning because they are not artificial. Service-learning increases motivation and retention of academic skills because specific learning goals are tied to community needs. There is no sense that the knowledge being learned in the course exists in a vacuum or has no value outside the classroom. By solving real problems and addressing real needs, students learn to apply classroom learning to a real world context. At the same time, students provide valuable services to schools and communities.

According to [Guide to Service-Learning Colleges and Universities](#), service-learning is “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities” (4).

The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse says of service-learning that “the core concept driving this educational strategy is that by combining service objectives and learning objectives, along with the intent to show measurable change in both the recipient and the provider of the service, the result is a radically-effective transformative method of teaching students.”

What both of these definitions have in common is the idea that students work **with** service organizations, not just **for** them, in order to enhance the learning they are doing in the classroom. There is a clear connection between what is going on in the classroom and what is happening at the community agency. In this respect, it is different from traditional volunteerism, in which a student simply does

things for an agency without any thought about how those activities connect to the classroom experience. Through service-learning, students can **learn, explore, and reinforce** course content, all of which results in real, meaningful learning.

Service-learning is **reciprocal** in nature, which means that both the recipient of the service and the students benefit from the interaction. Both parties get something valuable out of the experience.

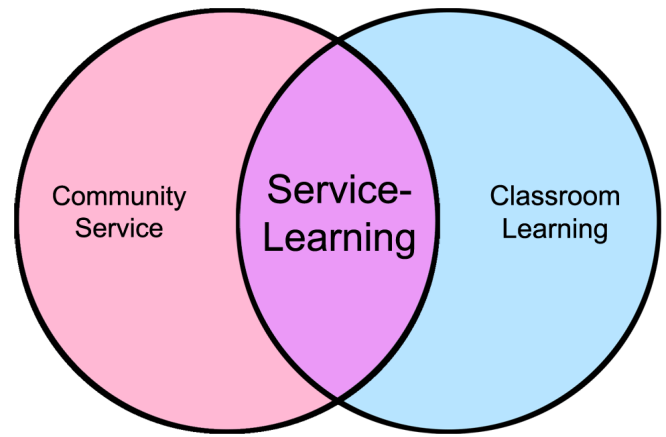
Because of the reciprocal nature of service-learning, it is also **transformative**. A good service-learning project transforms students from passive receptacles of information into active employers of knowledge and skills. Best of all, the transformation is one that occurs organically, as an outgrowth of the service-learning, which means that students are more likely to retain the new habits of mind and action which were fostered by the service-learning experience. Students who previously felt that their coursework was pointless will see the value of it in the real world. Those who believed that they were not able to master a given subject will find that they know more than they think they do when they use their classroom knowledge in their service-learning. And those who believed they had nothing of value to say or give will discover that they do have ideas, and that those ideas matter to the larger community.

Finally, service-learning is **reflective**. It is not enough, in service-learning, to simply “jump through the hoop” of doing the service hours. Even if the service-learning project required students to directly and explicitly use the knowledge gained in their courses, reflection is a necessary component of any well-designed service-

learning project because it is in reflecting on their service activities that students have the opportunity to “unpack the meaning of their experiences” in a thoughtful way. It is through reflection that students have the opportunity to think critically about what they have done, and it is through reflection that much of the real learning takes place. Without reflection, the connections between the service-learning activities, the course content, and the “real world” are in danger of being lost.

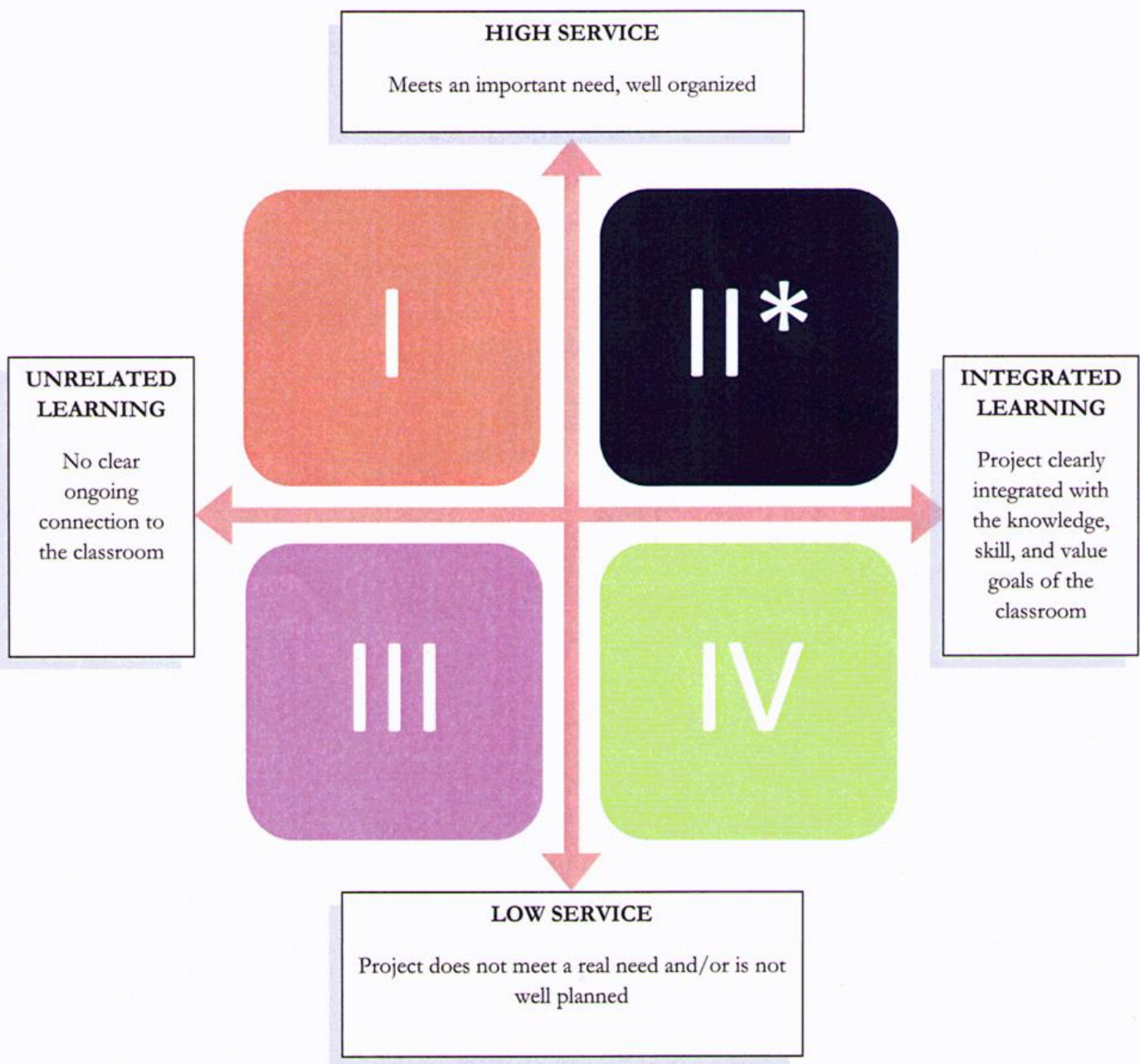
Service-learning is NOT simply volunteerism for the sake of volunteerism. Service-learning emphasizes both the service and the learning. By applying classroom content to community settings, with the dual goals of both fulfilling a true community need and helping the students engage in more meaningful learning, service-learning is a way to provide more authenticity and purpose to classroom learning. By contrast, community service emphasizes the habits and skills of volunteerism without regard to academic learning. Volunteerism therefore exists in a vacuum. Service-learning happens within a web of connections to the students’ schoolwork that enhances and reinforces learning, as well as promoting engagement with both the community and the classroom.

If you are at all familiar with service-learning, you have probably seen the traditional Venn diagram that is used to illustrate the connection between the “service” and the “learning” components of service-learning that looks something like this:



This is a good start since it emphasizes the need for service and learning to work together. The two elements work hand in hand. The service the students are doing emphasizes and reinforces what they are doing in the classroom, and their classroom lessons and course work can make them more able to meet the needs of their communities. This is the goal of service-learning, and when it works, everyone involved benefits.

A better way to conceptualize service-learning, however, was created by the Service-Learning Center at Stanford University. They created a Service-Learning Quadrant in which the “learning” portion of service-learning is located along a continuum from “unrelated learning” on the left to “integrated learning” on the right. The service element is located along a vertical axis, with “low service” at the bottom and “high service” at the top. The most effective service-learning projects are those that combine “high service” with “integrated learning,” which is Quadrant II on the diagram.



The Service-Learning Quadrant was designed by the Service-Learning Center at Stanford University in 2000. Ideally, service-learning projects should fall in quadrant II, although they will fall in different areas of the quadrant. The need met may be greater in some projects than in others. We would always strive for the greatest level of learning.

Why Use Service-Learning?

One of the biggest challenges any professor faces is getting the students to care about the material. Unless you are teaching upper-division courses, you probably have lots of students in your classes who are there just to fulfill program or degree requirements that they do not see as relevant. All too often, students do not see the relevance between their class work and their lives. They simply do not care enough about what is going on to give it much attention. “Why study English,” they think, “if I plan to be a nurse?” “Why worry about math if I want to be a chef?” While professors certainly do what they can to demonstrate and explain the relevance of their classes in the non-academic world, students don’t always (or even often) really believe it. This is often a holdover from their experiences in high school, and such preconceptions can be hard to break.

While we, as teachers, know that the courses they are taking really will matter in their chosen careers, our students often do not see that. In part, this is due to pedagogical practices that reinforce the notion that life is nothing like school. In our desire to be orderly and efficient, we often create classrooms and assignments in which “specified behaviors have certain rewards” (Dorman and Dorman 120). While this might be laudable from the perspective of clearly documenting and reinforcing certain rote tasks, it can also have the effect of “reduc[ing] multiplicate reality to a classroom devoid of real decision making, placing the student squarely in the passive, consumer role” in which they simply receive grades rather than mastering concepts (Dorman and Dorman 120). Not only does service-learning promote student engagement in the process, it provides the kind of

stimuli many students need to truly master complex concepts.

Service-learning can also provide an excellent way to appeal to students with different learning styles. While an auditory learner might do just fine sitting in the classroom and listening to the professor talk about a subject, kinesthetic learners will have difficulty with this mode of teaching. By taking the information out of the realm of lecture and into the realm of action, those learners will start to really understand and internalize what they are learning. The same goes for visual learners, who might need to see something in action to really understand how it works.

By providing real and varied opportunities for students to practice and reinforce the skills and knowledge they are learning, service-learning also encourages students to experience their classroom knowledge in different ways. It forces them to think critically and creatively to find and articulate the connections between what they are doing in the classroom and what they are doing in the community. This ability is essential once they leave college to go out into the “real world” where things are rarely compartmentalized and walled off by subject matter. Students who learn to make connections and implement meaningful action through service-learning are more likely to transfer that ability to other areas of their lives. The result is that they retain the information longer, and are more able to apply the knowledge learned in one class to another one.

As if all of this is not enough reason to incorporate service-learning into your classes, there is one more to add to the list: Service-learning supports the College’s vision, as expressed in our statement

of “Mission, Goals and Objectives.” The Anne Arundel Community College “Mission and Philosophy” statement includes a commitment to both “Promoting lifelong learning” and “Providing a source for intellectual, cultural and physical vitality in the community.” What better way to get our students to really connect with both their own learning and their communities, fulfilling part of the college’s mission in the process, than by making them responsible for the project by which they will demonstrate their mastery of the material? Furthermore, service-learning is explicitly mentioned under the College’s statement of specific goals, which includes the following goal:

“That students and the community benefit from a range of applied learning programs and activities at the college, such as the Center for the Study of Local Issues (CSLI), the Environmental Center, Institute for the Future, **service-learning**, internships and prior learning assessment” [emphasis added]



Why Make Service-Learning Student-Driven?

In many ways, this is the key question, isn't it? As professionals who have presumably put a lot of thought and effort into our course plans and the various assignments we use during the semester, what incentive do we have to surrender control of our classrooms to such a degree? We are the content experts, after all, and we have spent years honing our skills, knowledge and procedures based upon our experiences with students. Even if you are sold on the concept of using service-learning to enhance your students' experiences and knowledge retention, and by this point I hope you are, why risk the possibility that the students will drive your well-oiled machine off a cliff, as it were, by creating their own service-learning project, which might not be very good, rather than just doing the beautifully crafted one you have planned and ready to go?

Because it works. It really is that simple.

There is an old Chinese proverb that says, "Tell me and I forget. Show me and I remember. Involve me and I understand." Service-learning as a teaching tool is founded upon this notion, and if you are reading this guide then you already understand its value in the classroom. This how-to guide, however, is based upon a slightly modified version of this proverb, one that ends: "**Involve me and I care.**"

At its heart, service-learning is predicated upon this idea. We, as professors, hope that by involving our students more directly in both the community and their own educations, they will come to care more deeply about both of those things. If you have

gotten this far into this little guide, I'm assuming that you already believe this. Making the service-learning project student-driven is just the next logical step along that path. If we can involve our students in the entire process, they will develop a sense of their own power to control their lives, as well as a sense of investment in the process. Our students need to internalize these concepts at least as much as they need to learn math, biology, or English grammar. Not only will developing this sense of personal control over and investment in the process help them with their academic endeavors, it will help them succeed when they leave our classrooms and go out into the world as well.

The traditionally structured class is one in which the professor makes all the important decisions about what tasks to do, what final products to create, and what outcomes will result in passing grades. Students, the ones more immediately impacted by these tasks, have little choice other than to fulfill the stated requirements or not. They rarely have a say in what kinds of tasks will be acceptable, or any input into how their mastery of content material will be evaluated. Just look at most typical syllabi to see evidence of this. All the major assignments have already been created, often down to the smallest detail. If a professor has been teaching a course for many years, the assignments are often recycled year after year, with little change to the directions other than those having to do with due dates and possibly format requirements. And the assignments are, generally speaking, good ones. We are experts in

our various fields, and we have a sense not only of what we want the students to demonstrate with any given assignment, but also an awareness of how much guidance they will need in order to meet the objectives of the assignment. They are designed thoughtfully, with learning outcomes in mind. They include the requirements they do because those are the elements the professor needs to evaluate in order to determine if the students have mastered the content. For example, consider the following assignment from a traditionally structured developmental English class:

Write a paragraph in which you compare or contrast the characteristics of two subjects from the following list:

- Two teachers
- Two jobs
- Two restaurants
- Two parenting styles
- Two pets
- Two sports
- Two singers or bands
- Two places

This is an assignment that would come about midway through a semester of developmental writing. The requirements are based upon that assumption. A well-written paper based upon this assignment would demonstrate mastery of such things as topic sentences, organization, and use of specific details. The next paper in the semester would look much the same, but would ask the students to categorize something (students, children, pets, etc.).

These are perfectly reasonable assignments, but they are also excellent examples of what has been called the “empty assignment syndrome” (qtd. in Brack & Hall 143). Such assignments do not truly engage the students, who typically view them as pointless exercises whose connection to the course

learning objectives is mysterious and unknowable. “Who cares,” they think to themselves, “what the similarities or differences are between two random pets or places?”

And they would probably be right to wonder. Who does care? Certainly not the professor, who is more focused on issues of paragraph structure, logical organization, and grammar. Not the student, who probably just picked the item on the available list that seemed easiest. And not the students’ friends and family, who are profoundly unlikely to approach our students and ask, “Hey, what are the major similarities and differences between the beach and the mountains? I was just wondering.” The list of potential topics is externally imposed and there is no meaningful context for the task. Without a sense of context, the paper will be a rote exercise and the lessons it is attempting to teach will either go unnoticed or will quickly be forgotten when the next assignment comes around.

Even in the case of assignments specifically designed to support a service-learning project, the connection between the service and the learning as reflected in the writing assignments often goes unrecognized by the student. All of the professor’s hard work in developing a meaningful service-learning project can be lost in a heartbeat if the students do not actually **see** the connection between their service and their learning, or between their learning and their project. Even the most thoughtfully developed project can end up feeling like a series of isolated tasks, which defeats much of the purpose of using service-learning in the first place.

Even for exceptional students, the brightest of the bright, a traditional pedagogy in which the professor simply informs the students of what tasks must be done and what outcomes will earn what grades results in a belief that most of their

classes are little more than hoops that must be jumped through rather than real learning opportunities that will be useful later on. They might do the work, and even get good grades, but they won't feel connected. They won't believe that what they are doing in the classroom really matters in any meaningful way. They will perform the tasks expected of them, fulfill the requirements of the assignments, and promptly forget most of what they were supposed to have learned from the experience.

Students who have always done well in school have learned to deal with the traditional classrooms and standard assignments. They have learned the formulas and behaviors that will earn them good grades. They have learned to jump through those hoops. Unfortunately, they often do so on auto-pilot, without ever really thinking about how what they are doing in the classroom might have some purpose out in the "real world" beyond the classroom walls.

If the connection between classroom and life is hard to make for good students, imagine how much harder it must be for developmental students, who often lack even the notion of classes as "hoops" that must be jumped through before they can move on to the things they really want to do. For developmental students in particular, being able to make connections between what happens in class and what happens "out there" is important, but also difficult. Some of them have had years of experience with "developmental" or "remedial" classes in which they just did the same rote tasks over and over again. They have spent lots of time working on the components of academic success (such as reading or writing), but they have rarely been asked to combine those components together in any meaningful way. For these students, the transformative experience of a student-driven service-learning project can be a profoundly meaningful one. For what might be the

first time in their lives, THEY will be in control of what they are doing in the classroom.

Another group of developmental students are those who got through high school with no real problems, but who also did not take AP or Honors classes. They were in classes such as "Technical English" and "Basic Math." They went to class, sat there quietly in their seats, did the assignments with as little effort as they could get away with, and passed their classes with Cs. However, upon entering college and taking their placement tests, they are informed that they must first take one or more developmental classes. They are often angry at being placed in the developmental courses, believing that they are a waste of their time and a distraction from what they really want to do.

Add to this the fact that many developmental classes are not credit bearing (but still cost the same tuition!), and you have a situation almost guaranteed to generate resentment and hostility toward the college, the course, and the professor. Since they often believe that they should not even be in the developmental class in the first place, they tend to put very little effort into the work. This is a huge hurdle to overcome if any real learning is going to take place.

In both cases, the more important problem is that these students, whether they have always been in developmental classes or have only recently placed into a developmental course, experience a sense of powerlessness. They either feel carried along on the same track that they have always been on, just doing the same rote activities, or they feel as if the college is forcing them into doing something that is beneath them.

A student-driven service-learning project can help ameliorate these difficulties. It can help bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and real world necessity and between mechanical performance of

rote activities and genuine critical thinking and decision-making. Because the students have a lot of control over many of the specifics of the project, it encourages them to become more involved in the entire process. Rather than just fulfilling a list of requirements whose purposes they might only dimly perceive, they become responsible for

actually deciding what that list of requirements will include. Moreover, it can achieve these things for both the traditional “good students” and for developmental students who have always struggled in academic settings.



STEP 1: Groundwork for Success

The first step in creating a successful student-driven service-learning project is to figure out what your minimum requirements for the project will be. Just because the project will be student-driven does not mean you must surrender all control over the assignment. Rather, it means that the students will be directing their learning along a continuum that fits their abilities and interests. It also means that the students will be doing the majority of the work in the classroom. However, in order for this to work, you must go into the classroom on the first day knowing what elements of the project are absolutely fixed, which elements can fall within a range or continuum, and which elements can be left entirely up to the students.

When making these decisions, be as critical as you can. Make sure that any elements you decide to make required really do need to be required. Just because you have always required a particular number of sources for a research paper, for example, does not necessarily mean the paper could not be completed with slightly fewer sources. Think about your learning objectives and your goals for the course and the assignment. The more freedom the students have in designing the service-learning project, the more they will buy into the process.

There are six major elements of the service-learning project you need to decide on before the first day of class:

1. Learning goals
2. The final product
3. Service options
4. Hours of service
5. Reflection activities
6. Assessment method

Learning goals

As the professor, you need to start by deciding what learning objectives you want to accomplish with the service-learning project. Do you want them to see the connection between an ability to do math and to get a good job? Do you want them to develop an appreciation for how written communication can help them navigate problems they may encounter in the workforce? Think about what service-learning can help you accomplish that simple lecture and testing can't. This may seem obvious, but it is all too easy to start the semester without really figuring out what you hope the service-learning experience will accomplish. Without a clear goal, everything that follows will feel disjointed, and your students will pick up on that even if they can't articulate it. These specific goals will also help you determine which elements of the service-learning project are required and non-negotiable, and which elements are flexible.

Final product

In other words, what will the students create or do in order to demonstrate that they have

accomplished the goal of the project? Will it be a single assignment, or will it be a collection of assignments? Does it need to be a written text, or would a speech be acceptable? Can they create a DVD or a PowerPoint presentation?

Some potential final products include:

- Formal papers
- Journals
- In-class essays
- Letters to community members
- Letters to the editor of the school or local paper
- Oral reports
- Posters
- PowerPoint presentations
- DVDs or other visual representation

This is far from a complete list, but it should get you thinking about some of the options.

In addition to deciding what form the final product of the service-learning project will be, you also have to decide whether or not you will allow students to work together on it. Some courses and some formats lend themselves to group work while others do not. And if you do decide to allow group projects, you have to decide how you will determine who was responsible for what portion of the project in order to accurately and effectively assess final product.

Service options

By “service options” I mean both **where** the students can do their service hours and also what **type** of service you want them to do. You also need to decide whether or not you want them to work **individually** or in **groups**.

For some goals, you will want to limit which agencies are acceptable based upon the subject matter you are teaching. For a nutrition class, you

probably want students going to agencies that in some way deal with nutritional needs of the people they serve, such as an assisted elder care facility. If you teach history, you might want your students doing their service-learning hours at someplace of historical significance or which preserves the historical record. Historical London Town or the Veteran’s History Project might be good options. For an anatomy and physiology class, you might be okay with any agency that provides services for the aged or children. In these cases, where the student goes might be more important than what the student does once he or she is there.

For other classes or projects, you might be more concerned with what the students are actually doing at the agency than the particular agency. For an education class, you might not care what type of agency the students go to as long as they are actively engaged in some sort of teaching or tutoring activities. They might do this at the local YMCA, through an after-school program at a middle school, or in a homeless shelter for families with young children. A psychology professor might simply require that his students interact directly with human beings one-on-one regardless of where that interaction takes place. Delivering hot food to shut-ins via a Meals on Wheels program would be fine, but sorting and stacking canned food at a food bank would not.

Some disciplines and projects are open to just about any kind of service and any type of agency. In my English classes, I tell my students that they can “go anywhere and do anything and then write about it.” For my purposes, I do not need to limit the type of agency my students go to since every agency, and every community, will provide its own challenges and opportunities in terms of the purpose, audience, and context of the writing they will need to do for that agency. (See the example below for a more thorough discussion of this notion.) For a psychology class in human

development, however, you might want to limit your students to agencies at which they will actually work with human beings directly.

The other element of the service you need to decide on is the question of group work. You need to decide whether or not the students will be permitted or required to work at the same agency or at different ones, and whether they will work as a group or separately. If you are designing a whole-class service-learning project, then all the students will have to agree on a single agency at which to work, but they might not need to coordinate their service hours to work at the same times. If you are trying to encourage independent action and thought, you might want to require students to do their service at different agencies, or at least to do their service at different times. Or perhaps you don't care if they work together or alone, as long as they are at an appropriate agency doing learning appropriate tasks and working toward the final goals of the project.

At this point, it is important that your list includes as many options as possible. Remember, this is supposed to be a student-driven project, and that means you want to give them options. If you disallow too many agencies from the outset, the students will feel railroaded and come to resent you for it. If you are going to eliminate an agency from your list, be sure that you not only have a reason for doing so, but that you can articulate that reason to your students in a way that will make sense to them. I have found that you will often do better if you let the students eliminate the agencies for themselves rather than doing it for them. Not only will this give them a sense of empowerment over their own project, but a guided discussion in which you talk to the students openly about why a certain agency may or may not be a good choice for the project also provides an additional opportunity for you to help them

understand the goals of the course and the connections between those goals and the project.

For a complete and up-to-date list of agencies with whom AACC has community partnerships, visit <http://www.aacc.edu/servicelearning>.

Create a list of acceptable agencies that you can distribute in class as a single handout. Students will work from this list as they are designing the specifics of the project, so giving them something tangible to look at and mark up is helpful. Even if you are going to open the project up to any agency on the list, having a single page with the names of the agencies can be helpful.

Hours of service

Let the learning goal of the project guide you in deciding how many hours of service you will require, and think in terms of a range of hours, not a specific number. Think about how much time it will really take for students to accomplish your learning goals, or to be able to create the final project. Keep in mind that most of your students will need a little bit of time to get oriented and acclimated to the agency at which they are doing their service hours. They are likely to be a little out of their element at first, so you need to give them enough time to get over some of their initial confusion and disorientation. Service-learning projects often take students out of their normal comfort zones, and that can be disconcerting. They need time to get past that initial discomfort and really start to see the agency. Too few hours and the experience will not sink in. Too many hours and you will overwhelm them with the project requirements before they even start.

Reflection activities

One of the most important parts of any service-learning project is the process of reflection. Students need opportunities to reflect on what they are doing and learning in the community and

how those activities are related to the course content. They need chances to slow down and think about what they are doing, why, and how it is changing the world around them. Without active reflection, the connection between the service and the learning, and between the learning and the larger world, can become attenuated. While exceptional students might spontaneously think about these things, or talk about them with their friends at lunch, most students won't. They need structured reflection activities to help guide them in the process.

These reflection activities can be either written journal entries or class discussions, but the important part is that they take place regularly and while the students are engaged in the service itself. If you wait until the service component is over, there will be too much for students to process all at once. Even if the final product that you decided on is an essay in which the students reflect upon their experiences you need to give the students chances during the process to think about and internalize what is going on.

At this stage of the process, you want to come up with a selection of questions to pose to the students along the way. The more reflection questions you have at your disposal, the more options you will have during the process. Having lots of questions gives you the flexibility to pose the ones that seem most appropriate based upon the issues, experiences, and problems the students are dealing with. For example:

- How is the agency different from what you expected?
- What is the most difficult part about your service experience? Why do you think this is so difficult?
- What has been most surprising about your service?

- What skills from this class have you been able to apply to your service so far?
- What do you think you offer to the service agency that sets you apart from other people?
- Can you apply the information in Chapter 12 of your textbook to the work you are doing at the agency?

These are just a few of the possible questions you can ask to get students thinking about their service-learning experience while they are in the process of doing it. The goal is to get them in the habit of thinking and making connections throughout their learning experiences.

Assessment method

Obviously, you need to assess the service-learning project in some way, and that assessment will be linked to the type of final product that the students ultimately produce. Service-learning projects do not lend themselves to multiple-choice tests, so if that is how you have previously assessed student learning, you will probably need to give this issue some thought. However, even if you are accustomed to assigning and grading papers, the specifics of what is assessed in the papers needs to have clear links to the project itself. A generic grading rubric might not be the best option. Look back at the goals for the project. What specific skills are you looking for? Do you need to modify your existing rubric to give more weight to those skills? Is there some aspect of the service-learning project that is outside the normal rubric that you want to assess or reward? If so, how much weight do you want to give that aspect?

If you want to really make the service-learning project student-driven, let the students help create the grading rubric or assessment tool in much the same way they helped create the project itself. Since the ultimate goal is to give students a sense that they are in control over their learning, letting

them help create the assessment tool that will be used to evaluate that learning is another very powerful way to do this. You can also use this in classes that are not using service-learning to

encourage student involvement in the whole process of learning.

Here is an example of how I answered these questions for a developmental writing course:

Learning goal: I want my students to recognize the importance of grammatically correct, audience-appropriate written communication. In particular, I want them to be able to communicate clearly to a person or group of people who are not part of their regular family or social circle.

Final product: While “clear and audience appropriate communication” might include speaking, this is a composition class. That means the students need to write something. Since the service-learning project will run through the end of the semester, the written product should be multiple paragraphs. Journals are probably not a good option because they are written just for the student to collect ideas and reflect; they don’t take an outside audience into consideration. An in-class essay would not allow the students the opportunity to revise and polish their work, which is a key element in making it as clear as possible. A traditional essay would work, as would something like a letter to the local or school newspaper. Letters written to other community members might also work, depending upon the agency and what kind of letter they wanted to write. Whatever the final written product, each student must work independently on the written product. No group papers even if students are doing their service hours together.

Service requirements: Any of the approved agencies with whom AACC has partnerships will work as long as it is outside the student’s normal circle of friends and family. Students can either be placed as groups or individually, as they wish, and each student can decide for himself or herself. We’ll have to negotiate the specifics depending upon what sort of final product the students want to do, but at this stage I’m going with a basic “go anywhere, do anything, and write about it” model.

Service hours: Since the learning goal is in part about adequately addressing the needs of the audience in their writing, the students need to do enough hours to get a sense of who these people are. Fifteen hours would probably be ideal, but I know lots of my students are over-worked and over-committed, so I would settle for ten hours if I had to. I doubt I’ll be able to get them to do more than eighteen hours, but I won’t stop them if that’s what they want.

Reflection activities: I will use a combination of journal entries and class discussion. Some of the journal entries will be done by the students outside of class, some will be in-class writing.

Assessment method: Papers will be evaluated for how well they demonstrate mastery in the following four areas: Content, Organization, Style, and Mechanics. I will use the standard grading rubric in assessing these four areas because all of them are equally important to the learning goal of the project.

As you can see, the learning goals for the project guided my decisions about every other element. Once I knew what I wanted them to learn, I knew what sort of final product they would need to create to demonstrate that knowledge. We can work out the specific details together as a class, but at the outset I have established the broad parameters, the minimum requirements upon which I will insist. Everything else is up for negotiation.

In addition to deciding on the four elements of the project detailed above, you also have to decide how much of this information you are going to reveal to your students at the outset. Since the whole point is for this project to be guided by your students' needs and interests, it can be counter-productive to start the design process by laying down a rigid set of rules and requirements. Even if

your parameters are very broad (as mine are in the example above) students can feel as if they aren't really part of the process if you simply tell them what the rules are.

That having been said, it is possible to gently guide your students to making the "right" decisions. This can take practice, however, and you run the risk of not quite pulling it off if you aren't used to this kind of guided discussion. If that happens, you have to choose between letting your students' poor choices stand or admitting that the students never really had any choice about that item in the first place. The former can undermine your learning outcomes, but the latter will definitely undermine your credibility with your students.



Step 2: Nuts & Bolts in the Classroom

Once you have clearly determined the parameters of your service-learning project, it's time to get the students on-board. Below is a proposed day-by-day schedule based upon a three-day a week class. If your class meets more or less often, you'll need to make some alterations to this timeline.

Day 1: Start by engaging the students in a discussion of the course and its goals. It is helpful to either pass out a copy of the official learning objectives for the course, or to have students locate them in their course materials. Explain that the purpose of service-learning is to enhance their classroom experiences. Lead them in a discussion of what some possible goals for their service-learning project might be. The ultimate goal is to create a statement of the goal of the service-learning project that comes out of the students' experience and understanding, but which also fulfills the learning goals of the course. Using leading questions is a great way to get to your desired goal. Some good questions to ask include:

- How can experiences outside the classroom help you do better in the classroom?
- What kinds of activities would help you understand the course material better?
- How can helping other people with _____ help you do better on your tests or papers?
- How can _____ help you out in the "real world"?

Use their answers to guide the conversation to your pre-determined learning goal for the project. Using the language of your students as much as possible, compose a statement of the goal of the project.

Put this goal statement somewhere visible – either on an overhead or the board – or have students start filling out the "Service-Learning Project Worksheet" provided in the Appendix. Keep this statement of the learning goal in view as you move the discussion to the next stage, which is to determine what sort of final product the students will create. Again, the goal is to lead the students in a discussion of this question so that they come to reasonable conclusions about what a good final product would be. Creating a poster for a developmental writing course, for example, would not make much sense, but your goal is to get the students to figure it for themselves. Guide them to reasonable suggestions by referring to the course goals and the project goal you came up with together. Below are some of the kinds of questions you can pose to get the students to reach logical conclusions about the kind of final project they will ultimately be responsible for:

- How can you best demonstrate your mastery of _____?

- For whom should this final product be created? The class? The school? The community? The agency?
- Is a poster a viable way to demonstrate your mastery of _____? Why or why not?
- Does the final product need to be written, or could you adequately demonstrate your mastery of _____ by giving a speech?
- Would a group project be appropriate? Why or why not?

When you are just getting started on student-driven learning projects, I highly recommend that you require all the students to agree on a final product format. They should all be doing the same type of task. Either everyone does a speech, or everyone writes a letter to the editor, or everyone creates a PowerPoint presentation. Not only will this avoid the problems of some students thinking that other students got the easier option, but it will also make it easier for you to assess their work. Coming up with five different assessment models to accommodate five different kinds of projects is a lot of work and it adds a level of complexity to the creation of the project that is potentially more trouble than it's worth, especially if you are new to the student-centered learning model. If you are a veteran of student-driven learning, you might be more comfortable with students all doing a variety of projects as long as they all fulfill the parameters you established at the beginning. Record the final choice along with the previously established goal.

Day 2: Once you have decided, as a class, on what the final product of this project will be, it's time to move on to a discussion of where they might go in order to accomplish their goal. Have them think about what kinds of agencies would be good for the project and what kinds would not be good.

This would also be a good time to talk about what kinds of activities they think would be most beneficial. Would it be okay to sort mail alone in a back room for three hours a day for five days? Or do they need to actually interact with people working at or using the services of the agency? At this point, you are just trying to get them to think about general types of service.

After they have come to a reasonable idea about what kinds of service would be appropriate for the project, hand out the list of service-learning agencies you prepared ahead of time. Using whatever brainstorming technique seems most productive, have students discuss which agencies they think would be best suited to achieve the goal of the project. For each agency suggested, ask the students to explain why they think that agency would be a good option. When the discussion starts to wind down, have each student list his or her top six choices from among the agencies discussed. Even if you eventually want the students to agree on a single agency, at this point each student should record his or her own top six options.

Now is the time to talk about how many hours of service will be required for the project. Again, lead the students in a class discussion to determine how many hours will be appropriate for the assignment. Use the goal to guide this decision. Some projects can be completed in a relatively small number of hours, while others might require more. Remember, the service-learning is a means to an end, not an end of itself. Let the learning goals and the desired final product lead this decision.

At this point, pass out the Service-Learning Project Worksheet if you haven't already done so. Have the students fill out the worksheet based upon the decisions you have made so far. For homework, have them look into their top six options in a little

more detail. Tell them that they need to learn a little more about their options before they settle on their final choice. The best way to do this is to register for the Service-Learning Group via MyAACC.edu. Once registered for this group, students can access extended descriptions of all the community partners, including what services they offer, where they are located, what sorts of activities student workers would be doing at the agency, and how many placement slots they have available each semester.

Day 3: After the students have had a few days to sign up for the Service-Learning group and investigate the details for their possible placement agencies, lead the class in a discussion of what they found out, and whether or not they still think their top six options would all be good choices. End the discussion by settling on a FIRST, SECOND, and THIRD choice for the project. If the project is to be a group one, make sure that the students have selected and agreed upon an agency that can accommodate all of them in a single semester. Whether they are doing the project as a group at a single agency, or they are doing their hours individually, they need to have at least three options. Despite their best efforts, the first choice might not be available, and they need a couple of fallback options at their fingertips or they are likely to feel discouraged. Have them record their three choices, along with contact names and phone numbers, on the Service-Learning Project Worksheet.

At this point, the students should have a good idea of what their goals are, what kind of service they will be engaging in and why. They are now ready to contact a community agency, talk to the contact person to make arrangements to do their service

hours, and get their Service-Learning Contracts filled out, signed, and turned in. A copy of this contract, along with the required liability waiver, is provided for you in the Appendix, and is also available online via the Service-Learning Group.

Note that you have only dealt with four of the six elements of the project. If you are new to student-centered learning projects, the last two elements will be up to you. The reflection portion will be done periodically over the course of the project in the normal course of class discussion, homework, and in-class writing about the topic. Use the list of potential questions you developed in the planning stages as the semester progresses to encourage the students to reflect on their activities. When the project is completed, grade it based upon whatever grading rubric or assessment tool you developed.

If, however, you want to make even the assessment element of the project student-driven, now is when you would work with the students to create a grading rubric that will be used to assess their final product. I do this with my developmental composition classes. It takes an additional couple of days, but in my developmental classes especially I find it very helpful to let the students create the grading rubric.

Creating a student-driven grading rubric works in exactly the same way as creating a student-driven service-learning project. First you establish what your minimum parameters for assessment will be. Then you use a series of guided discussions with your students to develop the specific details of how those requirements will be met. I find that this takes about two to three days of class discussion to really work, but the results are worth the time.



Step 3: Staying on Track

And that's it. The hard part is over – at least for you. You have created a student-driven service-learning project and lead the students to the point of actually signing up for their service hours. All that remains is to touch base with the students throughout the semester to keep them focused and make sure they make all their deadlines, both yours and those of the Office of Learning through Service. Frequent reflection activities throughout the semester will help with this, as will periodic group discussions of how the project is going.

The more control you gave to the students in the creation of the project, the more likely they will be to maintain the motivation and enthusiasm to finish the project, but that doesn't mean you don't have to set deadlines. Some important dates you need to keep in mind are:

- Deadline for submitting service-learning contracts and liability waivers
- Your deadline for completing the service-learning hours
- The Service-Learning Office's deadline for completing service-learning hours
- Deadline for submitting service-learning evaluation forms to Service-Learning office
- Deadline for completing the final project in the course

The college's office of Service-Learning has its own, internal deadlines turning in contracts and completing service hours. Those deadlines are all clearly posted on MyAACC, in order to gain access to the group on MyAACC, contact the Center for Learning through Service. The MyAACC group will

also provide you with a complete and up to date list of approved community service agencies with which we have partnerships.

However, the project you and your students design may have deadlines that fall earlier than those imposed by the Office of Service-Learning.

Now it is up to the students to do the project that they designed. Your job now is to make sure that the project stays integrated into the class and that you are watching out for potential problems that may arise.

Reflection activities are key to keeping the students on track. They can be an opportunity for students to let you know what difficulties they are having with the project, and they are chances for you to continually remind them of the connections between the course material and the service project they are working on. If you keep those connections in mind throughout the semester, the project is more likely to be a success and the students are more likely to get the most out of it. I have found that you need about fifteen minutes a week at a minimum devoted to either reflection activities or problem-solving sessions is necessary to keep the students focused. Developmental students especially need frequent reminders to maintain a long-term project, even when it is one they have had a hand in creating. The time you spend in the classroom discussing their progress and reflecting upon their experiences makes it difficult for them to procrastinate.

Appendix

Professor's Service-Learning Preparation Worksheet

Learning goal: _____

Final product: _____

Service requirements: _____

Service hours: _____

Reflection activities: _____

Assessment method: _____

Service Learning Project Overview

What learning goals of this class can we accomplish using service-learning?

What form should the final product of this project look like? (You may check more than one.)

- Traditional paper
 individual or group?
- Journals
- In-class essay
- Letter, newspaper article, or pamphlet
- Oral report/speech
 individual or group?
- Poster/visual representation
 individual or group?
- Some other final product

What kind of agencies would be good for this project? Are there agencies that would NOT be good?

What kind of activities at the agency would be good for this project? Are there any activities that would NOT be good ones for this project?

Service Learning Project Overview

How many hours of service learning will we need to accomplish our goals? _____

My initial top SIX agencies for the service-learning project:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____



Do NOT fill in the last portion until your professor tells you to do so.

First, Second, and Third choices for service-learning agencies:

First Choice Agency: _____

Contact Person: _____ Phone Number: _____

Second Choice Agency: _____

Contact Person: _____ Phone Number: _____

Third Choice Agency: _____

Contact Person: _____ Phone Number: _____



Center for Learning through Service

Step 3

Student Union Building 130
 410-777-2366 Fax: 410-777-4366
smweiner@aacc.edu

SERVICE-LEARNING CONTRACT

Student name:		Student datatel or social security number (Required) :
Address:		
Home telephone		Business/cell phone:
Birth date:	Male Female	
Email address:		
Course number	Section number	Instructor name
Course number	Section number	Instructor name
Course number	Section number	Instructor name

Placement Confirmation

Required number of hours	Name of Agency:
Describe the service-learning assignment and student responsibilities: _____	

Required Approval Signatures

1. Agency Supervisor	Date
2. Instructor	Date
3. Instructor	Date
4. Instructor	Date

Liability Waiver

Due February 26, 2009(along with contract)

I, _____(name of student), hereby acknowledge that I am enrolled in the Service-Learning Program at Anne Arundel Community College. I understand that to participate in this program, I am required to travel to and from my assigned agency. I further understand and agree that Anne Arundel Community College is neither responsible nor liable for any injury, damage, or loss incurred while traveling to or from the agency, or while at the agency, and that I am solely responsible for my actions, inactions, and/or behavior while participating in this program, and agree to and shall save and hold harmless Anne Arundel Community College, its Board of Trustees, faculty, staff, agents, and employees from any claims, actions or judgments including the expenditure of attorney's fees and costs arising from my actions or inactions during my participation in this program.

I certify that I have no physical condition or disability that I have not disclosed which might affect my participation in this program. Should I develop a condition or injury, which limits my participation in the program (i.e. unable to lift required weights), I will immediately notify the Center for Learning through Service and provide medical documentation as required.

Additionally, with my signature below, I acknowledge my permission for any quotation of my comments, video, or still photography made with my image and any sound recording of my voice to be applied to a variety of uses by Anne Arundel Community College parties, cable casting, broadcasting and/or other forms of electric transmission. I hereby give permission for the use of the media described above and I release Anne Arundel Community College, its Board of Trustees, faculty, staff, agents, and employees of and from any claims (monetary or otherwise) that I may have related to the use of said media.

Student declares and also agrees to the following:

1. I will comply with agency policies, standards and regulations and serve in a professional manner with respect for others, especially with regard to confidentiality. I understand that all activities, in which I am involved as a service-learner, are strictly confidential. I will not release any type of personal information concerning clients of the agency listed above, without written authorization from appropriate persons.
2. I will complete the service assignment I have made a commitment to and will be on time or call the agency if I cannot attend due to illness or emergency.
3. I will contact **Sam Weiner**, Program Coordinator for the Center for Learning through Service (**410-777-2366 or smweiner@aacc.edu**) if I have concerns, difficulties and/or feedback about this agency or placement.
4. I do not currently nor have I previously worked or volunteered with this agency.

I hereby affirm that I have read and understand the terms and conditions of this Liability Waiver and Release Form and agree to accept the terms and conditions. I further agree and acknowledge that I will abide by all responsibilities as outlined in this document.

Student Signature _____ Date _____

Parent or
Guardian Signature _____ Date _____ (For
students under the age of 18)