Community Service-Learning (CSL) is an educational approach that integrates service in the community with intentional learning activities. Within effective CSL efforts, members of both educational institutions and community organizations work together toward outcomes that are mutually beneficial.”

(Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning Canada, 2011)

Six major features that differentiate service-learning from other service programs:

There are a wide variety of service programs available at higher education institutions. Each one serves a unique purpose for student development and learning. Service-learning can sometimes be used as a blanket term for all service programs but it has very specific criteria and should not be confused with other types of service programs. Furco (1996) outlines clear distinctions between these programs.

Within service-learning there are two main components: community related features and campus related features.

Community related features
The student provides some meaningful service that meets a need or goal. The need or goal is defined by the community.

Campus related features
The service provided by the student flows from and into course objectives, is integrated into the course by means of assignments that require some form of reflection on the service in light of course objectives, and the assignment is assessed and evaluated accordingly.
Evaluating whether service-learning is a good fit for your course

A common misconception is that community service-learning can only be utilized one way in the classroom. There are many different types of community service-learning and a variety of ways to apply the pedagogy to academia. Here is an overview of commonly used types of community service-learning. Each one offers unique benefits and challenges to an instructor. It is necessary to evaluate the impact that different types of service-learning could have on your course.

Adapted from “Fundamentals of Service-Learning Course Construction”.

“Pure Service-Learning”: This type of course sends students to community partners serve. These courses have as their intellectual core the idea of service to communities by students, volunteers, or engaged citizens. They are not typically lodged in any one discipline.

Benefits: It is easier to build a connection between the service and the academic content because they are very closely tied together. The topic is usually service-learning itself and not rooted in another discipline.

Challenges: It is difficult to draw in other themes or disciplines because the focus is on the service itself.

Discipline-Based Service-Learning: In this model, students are expected to work with community partners throughout the semester and reflect on their experiences regularly. Students are to use course content as a basis for their analysis and understanding.

Benefits: This is the most common because it is rooted in a particular discipline that is correlated with the service.

Challenges: Identifying a community partner that does work closely related to your academic theme can be challenging. You may end up identifying a community partner that shares similar goals and values to your theme but the service work is not directly related. When using this model it is important to clearly describe how the service and course objectives are related.

Problem-Based Service-Learning: Students relate to the community much as “consultants” working for a “client”. By working with community members, students gain first-hand knowledge about a particular problem or need.

Benefits: Helps to navigate some of the traditional challenges of curricular service-learning. Limits the number of times a student is required to go to a placement and relieve some of the logistical responsibilities.

Challenges: Presumes that the students will have some knowledge they can draw upon to make recommendations to the community or develop a solution to the problem. There is also the risk that students are viewed as “experts” in a topic, which can devalue the contribution of the community members.

Capstone and Portfolio Service-Learning: These are generally designed for majors and minors in a given discipline and are offered almost exclusively to students in their final year. Capstone courses draw upon the knowledge students have obtained throughout their coursework and combine it with relevant service work in the community. The goal is usually to explore new topics or to synthesize each students understanding of their discipline.

Benefits: This is an excellent way to help students’ transition from the world of theory to the world of practice by helping them make professional contacts and gather personal experience.

Challenges: Much of the responsibility is placed on the students. As a result there is a risk that once the course is completed students may leave and the knowledge/expertise they have gathered may be lost.

Evaluating whether service-learning is a good fit for your course continued on page 3.

Why is service-learning hyphenated?

Although easy to miss, the written set-up of “service-learning” is very intentional. It is intended to represent the even and reciprocal relationship between the two components – service and learning. A simple method that can be used by instructors to decide whether or not they are meeting the objectives of service-learning, is to consider if the hyphen really has a place in their course. Service-learning can also be referred to as “community service-learning” or “community action research”; for our purposes each of these terms refers to the same set of values described here.
Evaluating whether service-learning is a good fit for your course

**Service-Learning Internships:** Like traditional internships, these experiences are more intense than typical service-learning courses, with students working as many as 10 to 20 hours a week in a community setting. As in traditional internships, students are generally charged with producing a body of work that is of value to the community or site. Unlike traditional internships, service internships have regular and on-going reflective opportunities to help students analyze their new experiences using discipline-based theories.

**Benefits:** Service internships are further distinguished from traditional internships by their focus on reciprocity: the idea that both the community and the student benefit equally from the experience. This type of service-learning requires less regulation from faculty and course administrators, instead putting the emphasis on community partner evaluation.

**Challenges:** Similar to capstone projects, this type of service-learning introduces the risk that once the student has graduated their knowledge/expertise may be lost.

**Community-Based Action Research:** A relatively new approach that is gaining popularity, community-based action research is similar to an independent study option for student’s who are experienced in community work. Community-based action research can also be effective with small classes or groups of students. In this model, students work closely with faculty members to learn research methodology while serving as advocates for the community.

**Benefits:** This model combines benefits to the community and academic learning. The community is able to address an area of interest/need by working with experienced students, while the faculty member is able to investigate an area of research interest at the same time.

**Challenges:** Like the capstone project, this places a lot of responsibility on the student to manage the workload and complete everything on time. It is important to provide support to students pursuing this type of service-learning to ensure they are successful.
Other Service-Learning Characteristics:

Many courses may encompass more than one type of service-learning. To ensure that the most appropriate style of service-learning is selected, instructors may want to break down their course into a couple of major themes or components. After this is done, it may be easier to identify which style of service-learning is the most compatible with the objectives of the course. There are a number of different points to be considered when making these kinds of decisions.
For example:

**Placement-based or project-based service:** Service can be focused on a placement or on a project. Identifying which meets your goals for the course may help you select the right type of service-learning for you.

- **Placement-based service** focuses more on a certain number of hours completed with a community partner and usually lasts the duration of the semester.
- **Project-based service** focuses more on a need that the community has identified and less on the number of hours spent with the community partner. Students may not need to spend time at the agency to complete the defined project.

**Individual or group work:** Do you want students to be placed in groups and work together or would you prefer individual work? This is important to consider if you are planning on having multiple community partners and therefore multiple placement sites, or if you are doing a capstone project. Also keep in mind, any assignments or reflections that are submitted can be completed as a group or individually.

**Service as an Optional or Additional Course Credit:** Service-learning does not need to be the only component of a course. Many courses use service-learning for a single project or in lieu of another course requirement. For example, you can offer extra credit for a service project or you can offer to exchange a final paper/exam for a reflection piece on a service placement completed throughout the term.

You can also consider whether you want to implement mandatory or voluntary service-learning.

**Reflection focused service-learning:** Reflection through journaling is the most common method for evaluation in service-learning. Journals can be incorporated into course assignments and are used to help students investigate topics that are addressed in their service. Service-learning courses do not always focus on reflection, many have other types of assessment built into them. For example, capstone projects do not always focus heavily on reflection. Reflection serves a specific purpose so it is important to evaluate how you want to include it in your course and what emphasis is placed on it.

“Many faculty wanted, and still want, to have teaching and learning make a difference—for students, for themselves, and ultimately, for the world. Service-learning not only makes that desire real again but also offers a way of effecting it.”

*(Weigert, 1998, pg. 6)*
Logistics of Service-Learning

In 2010 we undertook a research project to identify some of the challenges faculty face in incorporating service-learning into their courses. One of the major concerns was that faculty members were not sure how to organize the logistics of a service-learning course. Listed below are six of the most important items to work through when getting started with service-learning. There are also a wide variety of resources devoted specifically to service-learning course design, outlined in the Resources section of this publication. In addition to this, the Student Success Centre (or the Experiential Education Office if you are in Social Sciences) is able to support you as you work through this process—please contact us if you are interested in our direct support.

**Course syllabus:** The addition of service to a course requires a re-evaluation of each category in the syllabus. The syllabus should reflect the integration of the course content with the service. The course syllabus should include the following items:

- Service as an expressed goal
- How the service experience will be measured and what will be measured
- The nature of the service placement/project
- The roles and responsibilities of students in the placement/project (e.g., transportation, time requirement, community contacts, etc.)
- The need(s) the service placement meets
- How students will be expected to demonstrate what they have learned in the placement/project (journals, papers, presentations)
- Present course assignments that link the service placement and the course content
- A description of the reflective process
- A description of the expectations for the public dissemination of students’ work

**Learning objectives:** When considering course design it is beneficial to use a learning-centred approach (a more holistic focus with an attempt to create significant learning experiences) as opposed to a subject-centred approach (the topics you want to teach). When considering your learning objectives, begin by identifying what do you want students to know, feel and do as a result of the course. By setting learning objectives you will create a framework for your course and it will help you make decisions and stay on track as you proceed.

**Identifying type of service-learning to be used:** Use the resources on pages 2 and 3 to identify which type of service-learning works best for you. If service-learning is not the best fit for your course, consider some of the other service-based course structures that are available on page 1.

**Finding a service placement:** Finding a community partner that works for your objectives and that you can develop a strong relationship with is an important component of course development. It is important to consider the sustainability of your course by evaluating whether a community partner you develop a relationship with will be available and invested in your course in the long-term.

**Applying for grants:** There are two categories of grants that are available for service-learning courses. The first are grants that are for “pure service-learning” courses where the goal of the course is service-learning itself. These grants usually integrate service-learning research related to the course. The second kind of grant is one that assists with the associated costs of incorporating service-learning into all other types of courses. These are usually internal to the institution and provide incentives for instructors to incorporate alternative teaching and learning strategies into a course.

**Identifying/developing assessment materials:** After creating the learning objectives you should start developing the assignments that will best measure students’ progress. There are a variety of commonly used evaluation methods that include essays (including reflective essays), tests, presentations, reports, reviews and performances. It is important to match the type of assignment you choose to your learning objectives.

“...These experiences will help them [the students] critically assess some of their fundamental orientations to society and their role as citizens...”

*(Eyler & Giles, 1999, p.141)*
Benefits of Service-Learning

A wide variety of Service-Learning (SL) research has demonstrated significant effects on students across personal, professional and academic levels. This list includes some of the most impactful effects on students but is not an exhaustive review of the literature. Please refer to the “Academic Resources” on page 9 for an in depth account of the following outcomes.

**Personal Outcomes**
1. A positive effect on each students’ personal development, such as: sense of personal efficacy, personal identity, spiritual growth, and moral development.
2. A positive effect on interpersonal development, the ability to work well with others, leadership and communication skills.

**Social Outcomes**
1. Facilitates a holistic understanding of poverty, culture and race.
2. An increased sense of social responsibility and citizenship skills.
3. Commitment to service is increased, and is associated with community service after graduation.

**Learning Outcomes**
1. Improves students’ ability to apply what they have learned to the “the real world”.
2. The impact of SL on academic learning as measured by course grades or GPA is mixed:
   a. Several studies show differences in academic learning between SL and non SL students, but calculate grades differently for these two groups of students.
3. Impact on such academic outcomes as demonstrated complexity of understanding, problem analysis, critical thinking, and cognitive development.

**Career Development**
1. Students are exposed to a breadth of career options and equipped with first-hand experience.

**Relationship with Institution**
1. Students engaged in SL report stronger faculty relationships than those who are not involved in SL
2. Improves students satisfaction with academic institutions
3. Students engaged in SL are more likely to graduate

Research has demonstrated that certain qualities and program characteristics can affect the above student outcomes. This indicates that instructors should put thought and planning into developing course content and service placements. These include:

- Placement quality
- Quality and quantity of reflection
- Application of service to academic content and vice versa
- Duration and intensity of service
- Exposure to diversity
- Presence of a community voice
- Receiving quality feedback from professors or clients
Role Clarity: The responsibilities of faculty members, community partners and students

It is important to understand the roles that different actors play in any curricular community service-learning experience. Defining these roles can be helpful to alleviate fears about the challenges of utilizing CSL in the classroom. The three major players in any curricular community service-learning experience are the campus facilitators, the community partner and the students.

**Campus Facilitators** (Can include faculty or service-learning staff, if available) are responsible for:
- Communicating with community partners, with other campus staff and with students
- Structuring and facilitating opportunities for reflection related to the service-learning
- Setting up a process for evaluation, communicating with the community partner as needed
- Monitoring student’s participation in their service-learning placement and offering guidance as needed

**Community Partners** are responsible for:
- Designating a “site supervisor” for service-learners
- Determining and communicating the needs of the agency, and aiding in the planning of service-learning accordingly
- Providing an orientation for students to the agency, the population it serves and its daily operation
- Providing training to service-learners and communicating all expectations
- Occasionally involved in scheduling, documenting and evaluating service-learning experiences

**Students** are responsible for:
- Selecting a service-learning site. This is dependent upon the condition that there are multiple options, and the instructor specifically outlined this as the responsibility of the student.
- Attending orientations and training relating to the service-learning placement
- Carrying out the service to the best of their abilities, respecting the guidelines of the agency and for reflecting critically on their experiences
- Completing all course-related assignments and work

**Service-learning staff (if applicable) are responsible for:**
- Serving as the connection between community agencies and faculty
- Completing institutional paperwork and reports about service-learning on-campus

The role of the academy has changed over time, with institutional focus shifting throughout history. During the Second World War, the role and culture of the academy has been shifting. Universities began as an institution that was interested solely in the educating of minds and the emphasis was on transferring knowledge to undergraduates. Later, the focus shifted to service. Academic institutions became a beacon for instilling the values of service in its membership and encouraging lifelong engagement. There was a sense of obligation for academics to contribute to the well-being of society. More recently, the focus has fallen on the scholarship of discovery. This resulted in a shift from educating undergraduates to supporting the scientific inquiry of graduate students and faculty.

Describing the academic culture as “shifting focus” is not entirely accurate because after each shift there was still an emphasis placed on the previous role. University mandates and mission statements still include learning and service while incorporating scientific inquiry. This spreads the resources of an institution thin and puts pressure on the administration to decide which is the most important. This is what sets the academic culture. The distribution of policies focusing on each of these roles sets a tone for the members of the academy to guide their actions. Currently, the academic culture primarily rewards the scholarship of discovery through rewards and incentives for pursuing it. A focus on the first two roles — learning and service — are still necessary and the onus is currently on educators to create a culture where they are also a part of the focus.
The Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) is responsible for developing professional standards for higher education. CAS promotes the assessment and improvement of higher education services and programs through self-study, evaluation and the use of CAS standards. There are a variety of programs that fall under their jurisdiction, ranging from residence to international students, religion to health, and financial to educational support. There are CAS standards in place for any campus Community Service-Learning programs, which outline the role of student affairs units related to service-learning, the effect of service-learning on students as well as the benefits on the community and institution engaging in service-learning. To view the CAS standards for service-learning please contact our office for a copy.

Identifying and Creating Community Partnerships
Strong community-campus partnerships are essential for the success of service-learning programs. Mutual trust between parties and open lines of communication help to ensure that each partner gets exactly what they expect out of a service-learning relationship. Not sure how to start developing those partnerships? Here are a few guidelines:

Existing Relationships:
If you have an existing relationship with a member of a community agency, consider speaking to them about the needs of their organization or other organizations who they work with. Setting up a service-learning component with an agency whom you are already familiar with is much easier than forging a new relationship.

Consider your own needs as well as the needs of the community partner:
In order for a service-learning component to be effective, it must match well with the course objectives and the material that is being taught. At the same time, hosting extra students places unnecessary stress on the staff of community partners. Service-learning relationships should be reciprocal and beneficial to both partners.

Consider logistics:
Service-learning relationships often require occasional in person meetings to communicate needs and assess the program. Students may also need to travel to the placements for meetings and/or to complete service hours. If the placement is not accessible or is a long distance away, students won’t be able to get there and arranging meetings could be a challenge.

Consider the length of the partnership:
Community organizations are allotting time and resources to train and supervise service-learning students. If they receive a student for one semester and are not given the option to extend the partnership, they may not break even in terms of time they have given and the service they have received. Community partners may also miss out on all the benefits that come with a long-term placement. Consider committing to a longer partnership to ensure the community agency benefits on the same level as the student.

Communicate, communicate, communicate:
Although it does require effort, communication is what ensures the survival of community-campus relationships. When planning a service-learning component, outline the course objectives and the objectives of the service-learning to the community partner so that all needs can be meet. Be available to the community partner for the duration of the service-learning component to resolve any issues, and evaluate the program together post-completion so that any necessary changes can be made.
Academic Resources

On-Campus Partners
Student Success Centre – servicelearning@mcmaster.ca
Experiential Education – prestosl@mcmaster.ca

Theory of Community Service-Learning/Academic Studies

Community Partner Resources

Course Design Resources

Other Resources

Community Service-Learning Associations
Canadian Association of Community Service-Learning http://www.communityservicelearning.ca/en/
International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning http://www.issotl.org/index.html
CLL Professional Organizations http://cill.mcmaster.ca/resources/pro_organizations.html
Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education http://www.stthe.ca/
Centre for Leadership in Learning http://cill.mcmaster.ca/resources/cllpartners.html