

High-Impact Educational Practices Service-Learning

Definition of Service-Learning: Service-Learning is a common pedagogical strategy used to operationalize community-based learning in curricular programs. “In these programs, field-based ‘experiential learning’ with community partners is an instructional strategy—and often a required part of the course. The idea is to give 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. These programs model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life” (AAC&U).

In essence, service-learning is an intentional and collaborative pedagogical practice that engages students in structured service to address an identified community need and help them “gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle and Hatcher, 1996, p.112)..

Service-Learning Course Criteria:

Service-learning goes above and beyond community service and volunteerism. While those activities are an important part of community-based learning, service-learning differs in several ways. More specifically, service-learning:

- Is **academically integrated** —service is part of the coursework, not an unrelated "add on" requirement.
- Is purposefully designed with service projects that **focus on community needs AND academic outcomes**; the service activities address specific community needs related to the learning objectives of the course
- Uses **classroom and project experiences that build upon themselves** and on the accumulation of classroom knowledge.
- Includes an **evaluation of student work based on the learning gained** from their service experience, not on the number of hours served.
- Connects the student to a **structured reflection process** (minimally after the service project; ideally before, during, and after the service project).
- Includes S-L activity which **values community partner’s knowledge and experience**. When best practiced, involves community partners in the planning of the course and service project.
- Is based on a **collaborative and a reciprocal relationship** among faculty, students, and community partners; projects are typically real-world challenges that students, community partners, and faculty attempt to overcome together. (Adapted from Coastal College of Georgia)