

# 10 Steps to Develop and Execute a Service-Learning Strategy

From the Center for Community Involvement at Miami-Dade Community College come the following excerpts. You can read the full text on their web site at [www.mdcc.edu/servicelearning/facinfo.html](http://www.mdcc.edu/servicelearning/facinfo.html) for more ideas on how you might offer a similar step-by-step guide on your campus.

- 1 Consider the courses you teach and determine how community service might be helpful in enriching learning in that discipline. **Just brainstorm about the application potential to your course.**
- 2 Call or **visit the Service-Learning Center** to discuss and identify community placements that offer experiences that are relevant to your course.
- 3 With service sites or activities in mind, **consider your goals and motives** in using the application. What are you trying to accomplish for your students, yourself, and the community?
- 4 Based upon your motives, goals, and objectives **choose a course service option.** Decide how you will incorporate community service into your course.
- 5 Once you have chosen how service will be incorporated, review and **alter your course description and syllabus to reflect the change.** To be successfully integrated, the service experience must be more than just an add-on to an already full syllabus.
- 6 On the first day of class, **explain and promote the ideas behind including service-learning in your class.** Explain the twofold benefits to the student and the community. Make your commitment very clear and encourage them to take advantage of the opportunity for both the personal and academic growth that service affords.
- 7 **Work with students to develop specific service and learning objectives for their volunteer experiences.** Students must be guided in their development of these objectives so that they are clearly linked with the academic objectives of your course.
- 8 **Teach students how to harvest the service experience for knowledge.** Experiential learning requires that we learn where we are. ... Because many students lack experience and confidence in learning in nontraditional, non-classroom environments, we must teach them these skills.

- 9 **Link the service experience to your academic course content through deliberate and guided reflection.** The practice of reflection is what combines the learning to the service. We cannot assume that learning will automatically result from experience. ... Reflection can be in the form of journals, essays, class presentations, analytic papers, artwork, drama, dialogue, or any other expressive act.
- 10 **Evaluate your service-learning outcomes** as you would any other academic product. Remember, students are being graded on the academic product, not their hours of service.

## Common Faculty Concerns

- **Academic Rigor:** Is this another feel-good excuse to water down academic standards?

*If applied properly, this pedagogy is actually more rigorous than the traditional teaching strategies.*

- **Competence in application of the strategy:** Will I be able to apply the strategy successfully?

*Most practitioners report a steep learning curve with confidence developing fairly rapidly once the strategy is allowed to work....*

*The path to becoming effective in using the service-learning strategy is not always clearly marked. We often find ourselves "making the road by walking." ... Attending a few workshops and seminars dealing with service-learning will provide an opportunity for more active exploration of some of the skills and philosophy of the pedagogy.*

- **Students' ability to contribute meaningful service.** How can my students who are taking remedial courses in reading, writing, or math help?

*Our experience and the research literature suggests that this is not a problem; in fact, several authors cite*

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# Ten Steps to Service-Learning

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*impressive contributions in a variety of roles made by previously underachieving, marginal students.*

## **Time Constraints**



**Yours:** How can I fit something new into an already cramped curriculum?

*Service-learning is not an add-on to your current course requirements. It does not change or add to what we teach; it only changes how we teach it.*

**Students:** Most of our students work in addition to their school attendance. How can they fit community service into their already busy schedule?

*Service-learning faculty report that most students are willing and able to volunteer in the community. In fact, our research reveals that 67 percent of our participating students said that the workload in their service-learning course was manageable.*