Guidelines for Designing a Service-Learning Course

1) General

    a) In broad terms, Service-Learning courses are those that provide:

        i) Relevant and meaningful service partnership with the community

        ii) Enhanced academic learning.

        iii) Critical reflection.

            (1) Adapted from Howard, J. (2001. Service-Learning course design workbook. Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning.

    b) Service-Learning courses should be classroom-based courses. Internships, student teaching, clinical experiences and field placements are excluded from this definition.

    c) "Classroom" here means an on or off campus location in which the entire class meets on a regular basis for instruction.

    d) Introductory courses in pre-professional disciplines may be considered Service-Learning as long as the courses follow the specific guidelines described below.

2) Specific:

Note: The following guidelines help distinguish Service-Learning courses from other types of courses but are not so rigid as to stifle faculty creativity. Faculty members are encouraged to submit courses that substantially meet the definition and general criteria for Service-Learning described above.

    a) Academic Emphasis

        i) The service-learning connection to the academic discipline and/or content of the course is explicit and clearly explained in the course syllabus.

        ii) Knowledge from the discipline informs the service experiences with which the students are involved.

        iii) Integration of service-learning activity is outcome-driven. It should be described in the syllabus as a methodology for achieving specific student learning outcomes.

        iv) Service-learning as a pedagogy has valued and important learning outcomes. These outcomes should be considered and included in the course syllabus.

    b) Participation

        i) Participation in the service-learning aspect of the course may be required or offered as an alternative to other assignments.

        ii) Participation may be individual, in groups, or as an entire class.

        iii) The number of required hours for the service-learning activity will be determined by the student learning outcomes of the course. Contact hours will vary among service-learning courses. According to Campus Compact, the national average for contact hours in a service-learning activity is 20-25 per 15 week semester.

    c) Value-Added Service

        i) The service activity will involve reciprocity between the community and the college. In other words, faculty and/or students collaborate with the client or community

organization to clearly identify the mutual benefit of learning for he student and the *value-added* service to the client or organization.

    ii) Opportunities for building relationships, interaction and observation will be designed into the service in ways that meet community needs and help build the capacities of the client or organization.

    iii) As much as possible, the service should be conceived within the context of a sustainable partnership with the client or community organization. Thus, multi-semester projects or projects that extend beyond the boundaries of the course are encouraged.

    iv) While most service should take place off campus, consideration will be given to service-learning courses that incorporate intensive interaction between students and community recipients on campus, as long as the service takes place "beyond" the classroom.

d) Reflection

    i) A systematic (e.g., regular and ongoing) process for reflection should be clearly defined in the course syllabus. These reflection activities and assignments should provide students the opportunity to:

        (1) Link theory and experience and learn more about the course content as a result of the service experience;

        (2) evaluate the impact of service on the client or community; and,

        (3) experience some level of personal growth through participation in service-learning.

e) Evaluation and Assessment

    i) A systematic process for assessment should be clearly defined in the syllabus. Assessment of service-learning should provide information on:

        (1) The degree to which student learning outcomes relating to both course content and personal development were met; and,

        (2) the degree to which the student's service has been valuable to the community organization.

    ii) Evaluation and assessment activities should be conducted prior to the service experience, during it and after it has been concluded.

    iii) Formal strategies for communicating with the partner community organization should be specified. These strategies will normally include a combination of site visits, e-mail and telephone conversations; conferences; use of evaluation forms; and, others as appropriate. The particular mix of communication strategies will depend upon the nature of the course.

Final Note: It should be emphasized that these guidelines are just that – guidelines. Faculty members are encouraged to use their creativity and initiative in designing their own service-learning courses. Faculty members are also encouraged to utilize the resources of the Center for Service Learning, Campus Compact http://www.psc.cornell.edu/nycc/, and their colleagues in service-learning in designing and implementing their courses.