

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE: ESTABLISHING A SERVICE LEARNING OFFICE-- WHAT TO DO AFTER FUNDING IS IN PLACE

Source: Shannon Zoet, MCC AmeriCorps*VISTA, Jackson Community College 2004-2005

1. Explore what types of service learning (SL) currently exist at the institution (Lawrence). Many instructors utilize SL without knowing it or sharing it with others. Determine the best way to reach all instructors—email, questionnaire, phone, in-person, etc. Explain SL as defined by your institution, and then ask if there are components of their courses that might fit the definition. Be sure to record all findings. In addition, find students already involved in community service that may advocate for SL.
2. Help faculty to understand SL. While individual discussions with each instructor are ideal, it is also effective to offer some kind of training, formal or informal. Gather information from well-established SL programs and create a resource library for faculty to access for additional information. Continue talking about SL whenever possible—at department meetings, community meetings, in casual conversation with potential participants, etc.
3. While SL benefits all parties involved, the needs of community partners must be considered priority. Determine community needs (Lawrence) by reading community reports, scanning local media, and talking to area agencies about their needs. If a volunteer center exists in the community, inquire about community needs there. Think about how the courses at the institution might address those needs through a SL project.
4. After discovering those supportive of SL, it is useful to form a steering or advisory committee (Jacoby, 239). Ask faculty who already do SL or are strongly interested to participate. Ask administrators and staff who support SL. Ask representatives from community agencies already engaged or those that could be potential partners in the future. Ask students who participate in community service to sit on the committee. The purpose of this committee will be to define the function and direction of SL at your institution. It is probably best to meet at least quarterly as a group. At the beginning, the steering committee may help to write a mission statement for the service learning office, and define initiatives and goals.
5. Create an ongoing system for gathering and recording data about SL at the institution. Create forms that can be filled out each semester by participants and partners. Suggested forms include: SL course information (from instructors); partner information (from community agencies); SL interest, SL timesheet, pre- and post-SL surveys, SL course evaluations (from students). These can be done online or in paper form, depending on what works best at the institution. Also create a database in which all of this information can be cataloged and stored. Request the assistance of those in the Institutional Research or Information Technology departments to establish the best possible database.
6. To get the word out about SL, create materials that can be circulated to students, faculty, administrators, partners, and the community. (Jacoby, 241). If possible, create a separate logo for the office and include that on all materials. Helpful communication materials include a website, brochures, quarterly or monthly newsletters, T-shirts or other items that can be worn or used by students who are representing the institution in the community.
7. It is important to continually demonstrate the value of service learning. Take advantage of award and recognition opportunities by nominating worthy faculty and students (Points of Light). Once a service learning office has been established at the institution, hold a recognition celebration to honor those who have been involved. Share the program's successes with administrators, and work with the marketing department to draw media attention to program impacts for students and for the community.

Resources:

Jacoby, Barbara and Associates. [Service-Learning in Higher Education](#). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996.

Lawrence, Dennis. [Effective Practice: Starting a service-learning program](#). The Resource Center: Corporation for National and Community Service. 20 April 2005.

Points of Light Foundation. [Effective Practice: Designing a service-learning program in ten steps](#). The Resource Center: Corporation for National and Community Service. 19 April 2005.