

2008-2009

# *Faculty Guide to Service Learning*

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Applying academic lessons learned in the classroom to help build healthier and more engaged communities.



Start Near...  
Go Far



**Mount Wachusett**  
*Community College*

Mount Wachusett Community College—444 Green Street, Gardner, Ma.

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## What it is and why we do it...

Service Learning at Mount Wachusett Community College is a teaching method that combines community service with academic instruction as it focuses on critical, reflective thinking and civic responsibility. Service Learning programs involve students in organized community services that address specific local needs, while developing their academic skills, sense of civic responsibility, and commitment to the community (from *Campus Compact National Center for Community Colleges*).

Service Learning has been integrated into the curriculum at MWCC for a number of reasons. First, service learning has a definite impact on the student involved – not only by incorporating the pedagogy of experiential learning, but also by having a demonstrated impact on their grades, the likelihood that they will remain in school, and their outlook on a number of other facets of life; second, it allows faculty to use the pedagogy of experiential learning to create an epistemology that has an impact on their student beyond the borders of the course; another major reason for incorporating community-based service learning into the curriculum is the very real impact that it has on our community, lending credence to our Institutional Mission. Our students are providing an invaluable service to local nonprofits and agencies that otherwise would not be able to accomplish the goal that a particular project will provide. The nonprofit agency is in turn able to aid the course instructor by co-creating an epistemology that will impact our students in a number of ways, many of those beyond the walls of this institution.

The Office on Academic Affairs, with support from the Center for Democracy & Humanity, provides opportunities for students to learn and grow through Service Learning experiences each academic year. To date, more than 1500 students have dedicated more than 30,000 hours of service to our communities. Working toward a change in culture, and building on altruism already evidenced in our community, MWCC students are already mobilizing to effectively become an indicator of change in the 29 cities and towns served by the College.

## Getting Started.....

If you are interested in incorporating a service learning project in one of your courses, you should call Melissa Fama at ext. 288. She will set up an appointment with you to work with one of the Service Learning team members. Someone will help you through the entire process. Developing a project requires some work but with the assistance provided to you, it isn't overwhelming and is worth the pedagogical benefits. Information in this booklet will help you think about potential projects.

When you chose to incorporate Service Learning into one or more of your courses, you are making a semester-long commitment. An ideal service learning experience should require students to complete twenty hours of service over the course of the semester, which averages out to roughly two hours a week for ten weeks; and students should be required to complete two reflection pieces. The reflection is done prior to the engagement in service and a reflection piece is done at the completion of the service. Reflection can be done in a number of ways, several of which are discussed on page 22 of this guide. Reflections allow

the student to connect what they are experiencing in their placement to what they are learning in your classroom. The learning outcome can be measured through comparison of the prefection and the reflection pieces.

Lastly, it is important that you as the instructor of the course have an understanding of the agency that your students are doing service for. If your students are working off-site, and at the agency that you have chosen to do your project with, you should make at least one visit to the site during the semester or have John Fielding make the visit. If your students are working on-campus for an agency, then a meeting between the coordinator at the agency and yourself should occur at least once during the semester as well.

## Things to Consider

When you are deciding how your class can participate in a Service Learning project, it is important to take a number of factors into consideration. We strongly encourage you to speak to other instructors who have participated in service learning in prior semesters to get their perspective, and to find out what may have worked very well or not worked at all for them. The Service Learning committee is a great avenue to have dialogue with colleagues who have experience doing projects. Here are some things to think about when planning a project.

- What types of opportunities are available for your students that will successfully meet your goals for the class?
- Do you want to make it a requirement of the course, an extra credit opportunity or an optional assignment?
- Do you want students to be placed at an agency or do you want students to work on a group project?
- Do I want my students to carry out this project at one agency (rotating shifts/hours), or at separate agencies?
- What is the time commitment for each student volunteer?
- Does this agency require orientation, and if so, how many hours? Can orientation be done in class by bringing a member of the agency/organization in? Orientation typically should not count toward the number of hours served, but if you think it should be, how and why?
- Where is the organization/agency located? Will my students be able to get there without too much difficulty? If the agency can help to provide transportation, is it possible for them to put MWCC on their insurance to reduce liability issues?
- What will your absentee policy be with regard to this project, and how are students to make you and/or the agency aware of their absence?
- What about school breaks and holidays? Can a student perform service hours during these times?
- Can your class work in pairs or groups?
- Is the agency/site handicap accessible? If you believe that a student may require accommodation in order to fully participate in Service Learning activities, please contact the Melissa Fama at (978) 630-9288 to discuss specific needs.

## How Do I Incorporate a Meaningful Project Into my Course?

Incorporation of a meaningful and high-quality project into a course, whether it is a new course or an existing course, takes some creative thought. There is a wealth of information available to you in terms of resources, for items such as syllabi, funding sources, effective practices, theory, pedagogy, etc. A number of these resources are listed for you on page of this guide, under “Resources.”

The best place to start is to discuss the project with your division dean. H/she will go over the required paperwork, how to get students involved and will refer you to finding the opportunities.

One thing that is incredibly important to understand about service learning is that it is not just for certain majors or certain fields of study. There are opportunities available across a wide spectrum of fields, including the “hard” sciences, engineering, accounting, automotive technology, and disciplines that aren’t often thought of as having an immediate connection with community needs.

## Preparation for Service Learning: Planning & Design

The Service Learning management team will work with you to design a project and help with implementation.

Preparation for incorporating a service learning project within your class starts with identifying the learning goals of your class and how the service-learning experience might support these goals. It involves identifying a community partner and designing a community experience that leads to intended outcomes for students while meeting an important community-defined need. This section is intended to help give you a starting point for planning and designing a service learning project within your course.

A checklist for planning your course and service learning experience: What is to be learned?

- Learning objectives
- Integration of Learning Objectives and Service Experience: How will you do this?
- The Syllabus: Describing the Service-Learning experience
- Preparing students for the experience
- Planning for ongoing assessment and feedback
- Planning for evaluation

A Checklist for planning with your community partner(s): What is to be accomplished?

- Meeting and developing a relationship
- Defining community needs/assets and connecting with learning objectives
- Planning the Service: when, where and how much?
- Planning for supervision of service: Who? How often? Safety issues?
- Clearly articulating and confirming roles of all participants

- Planning for regular communication between faculty, students and community partner(s)

Logistics: How will this all work?

- How will students get there?
- What do students do if something goes wrong on site?
- Who keeps track of hours?
- Are there supplies needed? If so, who pays for them?

## Incorporating Reflection into the Experience...

### ***On Reflection...***

*Reflection is a process of seeking clarity about truth...truth in experience, thought, beliefs, instincts and relationships. Reflection can be accomplished independently or as a collective endeavor. Yet, however done, reflection demands consideration of one's internal state (beliefs, feelings, assumptions) and external circumstances (actions, relationships, power dynamics, obstacles). Reflection also demands a self-honesty and humility that will hold its own against affront from any quarter.*

- ***From the Kellogg Forum Higher Education for the Public Good***

### ***Benefits of Reflection in Service Learning***

Reflection is an essential part of any service learning experience, giving students the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the impact that an experience has had on their academic experience and on themselves as individuals. Service learning lends itself to a number of benefits to students, for example:

- Build capacity to notice and understand feelings
- Skill development
- Increased capacity for authentic relationships
- Self-Awareness
- Reflection upon action can create a more informed action next time
- Recognize assets of others
- Listen to self and others in new ways

### ***Steps to Designing a Reflection***

- 1) Identify which learning outcomes you want to see as a result of the experience, based on the larger learning outcomes for the activity or organization. For example, reflecting on any changes in our perception of educational equity issues; or, reflection on the ways our own race, gender, age, or life experiences influence our perspectives and opinions.
- 2) Create the questions you want your students to reflect on. These questions should aim to link course content to the service learning experience, to link co-curricular learning outcomes with the experience, to raise the students' level of self awareness, to promote civic engagement and to examine the students' perceptions of social justice. Some sample reflection questions are:

- a. From your experience at this agency/organization, what course concepts have you seen in action?
  - b. Where have you seen x theory in action at your community site?
  - c. What are some examples where x theory does not seem to apply at your community site?
  - d. What leadership qualities have you seen in each community member you have come to know?
  - e. What leadership qualities have you found in yourself?
  - f. Will service play a role in your future career? In your family and relationships? In your life outside of work? Why or why not?
  - g. What has surprised you about this experience? What assumptions of your own, perhaps ones you didn't realize you had, have you become aware of as a result? How has your experience reinforced or challenged those assumptions or beliefs? What skills of yours have been an asset in the community?
  - h. What thoughts do you have about the kind of community member you want to be? Has anything from this experience impacted those ideas?
  - i. From your perspective, why do you think there is a desire and need for the service you provided? Do you think there are conditions of inequity that make the service necessary? If so, what next steps, if any, do you think you could take to better understand the underlying inequities?
- 3) Determine timing – when? How much time of a time commitment is required?
  - 4) Identify various reflection strategies that will engage students in those questions and accomplish the learning outcomes, and choose the most appropriate (see samples below).
  - 5) Determine how students will be evaluated/assessed.
  - 6) What challenges do you anticipate with facilitating this exercise?
  - 7) Materials or preparation needed.

### ***Sample Reflection Methods & Strategies***

#### **Written**

- Journals (free-form or structured, individual or team journals, critical incident journals that reflect on events in which a decision was made, a conflict occurred, a challenge was addressed, etc.)
- Letters
- Editorials
- Diagrams
- Personal Web Pages/Blogs
- Powerpoint Presentations/CD's
- Essays
- Free-write
- Discussion boards
- Student-written questions
- Reflective Narratives

## Oral

- Small groups
- Case studies
- Audio recordings
- Peer interviews
- Focus Groups
- Presentations
- Conference with faculty
- Teach content to peers or others

*Adapted from "Facilitating Student Learning Through Reflection", a presentation by Kathleen Rice, Ph.D., KL.Rice Consulting, Oakland, CA; and from National Campus Compact*

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## How Will the Work of My Students be Recognized?

All students who successfully complete a Service Learning experience (with a minimum of 20 hours of service and a positive evaluation from both the community agency and the instructor) will:

- Have "Service Learning" indicated on their college transcript
- Receive a certificate of participation at the end of the semester
- May be eligible to receive special recognition awards and be invited to special recognition events
- Have material to boost their resume
- Gain valuable job contacts and/or referrals
- Students who perform more than 40 hours of service in an academic year will receive a medal of honor upon graduation

Students who complete 40 hours of service learning , in addition to all of the above, will receive a medallion to be worn at graduation. They will also be eligible to receive an award from the Community Builders organization.

## RESOURCES

A list of resources is available on the Center for Teaching and Learning website :  
<http://www.ctlmwcc.com/>