For his inauguration as Chancellor of The University of Mississippi, Dr. Daniel W. Jones purposefully chose as his theme Transformation through Service. Dr. Jones was quoted in The Oxford Eagle, “…society is looking to the universities to provide leadership beyond the classroom to address society’s needs” (March 10, 2010). Chancellor Jones acknowledges that this university is doing a great job with service to the community already so his theme is not new to the university. He notes that service is one of the three primary commitments of the university under its mission: “The University will be a leader in providing service to the public, through the application and dissemination of its expertise and knowledge, in Mississippi, the region, and the nation.” And he says, “Any societal need turns to the university for a lead, and it is natural. We live in a state where there is much need.” And though we live in an economically depressed state, the university is a relatively prosperous segment of the community and state. As such, if we own service as a university commitment and purposefully work in this arena, we can do much to benefit the community, state and region.

When faculty and administration accept service not as a new notion, and not as an extra duty, but as a way of making a real difference in people’s lives using the knowledge and human resources available on campus, there is an opportunity for learning in context and with a purpose, an opportunity for expanding the methods of teaching beyond the classroom, and an opportunity to test research theory in addressing state problems and issues. As academics, we believe that the best learning is done in a free form way with faculty having the academic freedom to institute the methods of learning. Chancellor Jones is not trying to change that. However, he does challenge faculty who want to make a difference in Mississippis’ lives to use their academic freedom to explore how university course work can embrace service and live up to the demands made of this great university in meeting societal needs.

When asked will there be faculty and staff rewards as a result of the approach to service you envision, Chancellor Jones replied, “The short answer is yes. Our recognition system for compensation, promotion and tenure, require the standard recognitions of teaching research and service. It is my hope that process of evaluation for recognition is elastic enough to be attentive to whatever focus the university sets. For example, at the health science campus, we decided to move forward in research and made some purposeful adjustments

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Chancellor Dan Jones has asked that the University join him in promoting a culture of service to the community. One way that can be done is through service learning projects completed as part of course requirements. This article describes service learning, its key components and how it can support the learning objectives of university courses.

What is Service Learning?
The following definition comes from the National and Community Service Act of 1990.

The term “service-learning” means a method (A) under which students or participants learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that (i) is conducted in and meets the needs of a community; (ii) is coordinated with an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, or community service program, and with the community; and (iii) helps foster civic responsibility; and (B) that (i) is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students, … and (ii) provides structured time for the students or participants to reflect on the service experience.

PARC is a commonly used model of service learning initially outlined in a 1992 report on the value of service learning as a drop-out prevention tool in high school (Duckenfield & Swanson, 1992). PARC captures the four most important components of service learning: preparation, action, reflection, and celebration.

Preparation. The first stage in initiating service learning projects is to conduct an assessment to identify the needs and social concerns of the community and the resources and interests of students who would participate. With the needs assessment, faculty identify university courses that could impact those identified needs. Faculty may either adapt existing courses or define new ones and decide how students may help in addressing the needs. Once the needs assessment has been completed and analyzed, students with faculty help select and plan projects. Because service learning projects often take place in communities with different demographics, student preparation should include diversity training. Through training, students develop an awareness of personal biases and special community needs. Training also involves identifying and learning necessary technical skills, communication and collaboration skills, and executive functions such as responsibility, organization, and problem-solving.

Action. Students provide service to the community by participating in the project directly, indirectly, or through civic action. Direct service allows students to interact personally with community members. Indirect service separates students from the community as they work to channel resources to the community. Because direct contact is missing when students conduct indirect service, it is important to provide a means for students to see the impact of their initiatives.

Reflection. Student reflection allows for consolidation of learning by combining careful observation and questioning skills with critical thinking. Reflection should be ongoing, structured, yet flexible, and have clear objectives grounded in related course learning objectives. Reflective tools include reading and writing assignments, discussions, and student projects.

Celebration. Students’ efforts are recognized and publicly valued in the final stage of service learning. Celebration in this stage allows the community to show appreciation and strengthens the students’ and community’s civic pride. The celebration allows students to congratulate each other and recognize gains (education, skills, and accomplishments) achieved as a team.

Benefits of Service Learning
Service learning, a form of experiential learning, engages students in problem-solving and critical thinking and leads to a heightened sense of civic responsibility. For example, this past fall, Dr. Cristiane Surbeck developed a senior/graduate course for the Civil Engineering Department entitled Service Learning in Water and Sanitation Engineering. Students teamed with Living Waters for the World (LWW) to evaluate a model drinking water treatment system installed worldwide in disadvantaged communities. Over the semester, students took repeated measures of coliform bacteria concentrations, tested the efficiency of the current system, proposed improvements, and tested an alternative water treatment system configuration. Students used LWW’s Clean Water Systems Handbook (2009) to guide their work and made
recommendations for the next edition by correcting calculations and adding new charts and tables. While the service learning course potentially benefitted disadvantaged communities, it strengthened students’ hands-on and critical thinking skills and increased their awareness of world water issues. “Students enjoyed the opportunity to gain hands-on engineering experience, to help LWW in evaluating the efficiency of the treatment systems, and to ultimately help people around the world to drink clean water,” Surbeck says.

Furthermore, a recent meta-analysis of the impact of diversity training (including service learning projects) on cognitive development, Bowman (2010) found that “College diversity experiences are associated with gains in cognitive skills, cognitive tendencies, and multiple/other cognitive outcomes, which underscores the role that these experiences may play in promoting various forms of student development” (p. 21).

How to Get Started with Service Learning

Incorporating service learning into course requirements takes thoughtful consideration of the learning objectives of the course, skills and resources of the students, and needs of the community.

Additional information can be accessed by joining the Service Learning Interest Group, a grassroots movement formed in response to Chancellor’s Jones call for heightened service. Faculty members from across campus now meet to promote service learning initiatives. To join the group, contact the Center at tlc@olemiss.edu. You will be added to the Blackboard “course” to read about, contribute to and be included in these efforts. Materials included on the Blackboard site include syllabi, service learning agreements, learning portfolio guidelines, and a short informational video on Intergenerational Service Learning projects.

An Invitation

All are invited to a reception and poster session in the lobby of Bryant Hall on Thursday, April 29, from 2:30-4:30. Students in several service-learning courses, including REL 387 Religious Ethics (Sarah Moses) and SW 498 Special Topics in Aging and SW 326 Gerontology: Social Welfare Aspects (Jo Ann O’Quin), will display projects. Posters may be viewed through exam week.

References


Planning Assessment for Service Learning
by Nancy Wiggers, Learning Specialist

Service learning is founded on the premise that the role of education should be to develop action-oriented reflective citizens who are ready and willing to participate in and contribute to the betterment of community. Service learning may be implemented as part of a course or as an institutional mission (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Thus at the heart of any service learning project, are community, faculty, and students. Starting with these groups to build the foundation for a service learning plan, planners question each group’s needs and consider organizational, instructional, and assessment changes that faculty must make for effective, meaningful service learning experiences.

Inherent in the academic focus of service learning is experiential learning. Students’ learn by constructing knowledge through their own experiences bridging the gap between what they know and what they need to know to accomplish goals. Service learning planners design projects to facilitate students’ cognitive and affective growth in a community-based setting, then plan assessment to determine whether growth takes place.

Before considering assessment plans for service learning projects, service-learning planners must develop clear goals addressing academic needs and identified community needs. Moreover, they must approach planning knowing that curricular learning objectives must be realized via student experience and must result in tangible community benefit. Because service learning promotes developmental goals, faculty members consider both formative and summative assessment plans. Having a plan for ongoing assessment is key to ensure the learning experience addresses any necessary changes in content, experience, perceptions and attitudes to achieve the desired objectives for each group.

Selecting Assessment Tools

General assessment targets include course content mastery, reasoning proficiency, skill competency, product creation, and dispositions. Service learning may incorporate all of these targets requiring different assessment tools.

Payne (2000) suggests a mixed method approach to assess service learning projects. Collecting both qualitative and quantitative data before, during, and after service learning activities provides a more representative sample of information on which to base achievement and diagnostic decisions.

According to Stiggins (1997) assessment tools can be organized in relation to general assessment targets. Selected response tools, including multiple choice, true/false, and matching, are possible to assess content knowledge, prerequisite knowledge to perform a skill or create something, and student attitudes. Essay tools allow students to demonstrate ability to understand relationships and reason with content or describe and expand on attitudes.

Personal communication, such as interviews and group discussions, allows students to demonstrate content knowledge, reasoning processes, skill proficiency, and express feelings. Though personal communication is not a tool to assess product, it may be used to assess students’ knowledge to develop a product and ability to evaluate it.

Performance assessment tools while not necessarily the best means to assess specific content mastery, allow students to demonstrate skills requisite for the service learning tasks. Faculty observations allow evaluation of the learning process and product while providing information from which to infer content knowledge and attitudes.

Assessment tool selection is based on the task itself and the type of information needed. Whatever assessments used, they should provide diagnostic information for improvements throughout the project as well as summative information regarding the value of the project as a whole for community, students, and faculty. For sample assessment tools, refer to the Learn and Serve America’s National Service-Learning Clearinghouse website at http://servicelearning.org.

References


http://www.servicelearning.org


Dr. Johnny W. Lott is retiring as Director of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at The University of Mississippi effective July 31, 2010. Johnny came to the University in February 2007 to establish the Center as a result of university task force reports and decisions in the Office of the Provost. With a background in mathematics education at the professorial level, as past President of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, as a co-author of numerous books and articles, and as director of a similar center at the University of Montana, Dr. Lott and his staff here have worked to improve faculty professional development efforts on this campus, providing 13 major workshop sessions during the 2009-10 academic year alone.

The Center, with a staff of four, is located in Hill Hall, a building recently renovated for its work. During Dr. Lott’s directorship of the Center, The Mantle was created as its newsletter with a current print readership of approximately 1,800 as well as being available online.

The Center’s website, www.olemiss.edu/depts/cetl, was designed to promote teaching and learning, features tutors for students in individual disciplines, information for faculty on teaching strategies and other topics, and promotes all teaching awards on campus. Along with leading orientation programs for new faculty and graduate instructors, the Center provides a doctoral seminar for students about to enter the academy as faculty members, formed special interest groups for faculty members, provides a resource room for faculty materials, handles all students who are re-admitted to campus, and provides skills workshops for students.

While working with individual faculty members to improve teaching, Center staff observes and views classes and reports confidentially to faculty members with recommendations for improvement. Among resources available to faculty, the Center aided on bringing Calibrated Peer Review software to campus to improve writing in classes and has promoted workshops in its use. As a resource, the Center has worked with individual departments and schools on evaluations, on meeting actions initiated through the IHL Blue Ribbon Commission, and in teaching demonstration classes in selected disciplines. Additionally in its brief history, the Center has provided multiple services for students and faculty, migrants to support teaching, and established a teaching award for graduate instructors.

### Resources

- The University of Mississippi has a service learning special interest group that invites participation. To be added as an instructor to a Blackboard “class” with access to all components of the class, email jlott@olemiss.edu or smossing@olemiss.edu. The class has announcements, minutes of meetings, and much more.
- Many universities have websites exhibiting service learning projects and other examples. See the following:
  - Guide To College and University Service-Learning Programs: [http://evergreen.loyola.edu/rcrews/www/sl/academic.html](http://evergreen.loyola.edu/rcrews/www/sl/academic.html)
  - Northeastern University Service-Learning: [http://www.northeastern.edu/servicelearning/about/index.html](http://www.northeastern.edu/servicelearning/about/index.html)
  - University of Delaware Office of Service Learning: [http://www.servicelearning.udel.edu/faculty_courses.html](http://www.servicelearning.udel.edu/faculty_courses.html)
in the process of compensation to give a focus and emphasis on research. Note that this move was done in a purposeful way. At every level of the university, I would hope that the recognition and reward component responds to the service initiative as it responds to teaching and research.”

Service at a university may appear as service via classes (e.g., the Innocence Project), service learning (e.g., a social work class in gerontology centered in homes for the aging), and service through practice and internships (e.g., practice teaching for prospective teachers). Chancellor Jones's vision of service is broad enough to embrace all these and more. In his inauguration address he said, “Gandhi taught us that the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” Regardless of the mode of faculty and university service, Chancellor Jones encourages all to approach it with the same spirit that one approaches preparing to and teaching a class or answering a research question. He asks, “How does one prepare for a class or a research question or a component of service if the only motivation is compensation? If my spirit is that the preparation is an opportunity to work with students, to help them become better people, then life will be richer and better as result of my work. Preparing for our work with a good spirit doesn’t need to take away fairness in compensation. But to me, spirit makes all the difference in the way in which I work. Service is already integrated into the fabric of the university environment. We are at our best as a university community when we think of others more than ourselves. It’s my hope we would neither be an isolated ivory tower institution nor a technical or trade school, but rather a healthy liberal arts university with a purposeful focus on the world around us. And it’s my hope we will do all we do with a spirit of responsibility and humility.”

Chancellor Jones added, “It’s not the desire that anyone stop doing one thing to do something else but I hope we would all have service at heart in all we do, to look with purpose beyond our individual interest to the broader community. If we are to ingrain service notions in students, we need a service mindset as well. Students need to see faculty engaged in this type of work. For all faculty to integrate into their teaching a heart of service would be a major accomplishment.”