

Service-Learning Scholars Leadership Focus Group  
Bennion Center  
12/1/08

Participants

Gender: 4 Female, 1 Male

Class Standing: 3 Seniors, 1 Junior, 1 Unknown

Ethnicity: Caucasian

Also present: Jim Asbrand (facilitator), Stacy Ackerlind (co-facilitator, JaNae Lilly (observer)

**Question 1: How do you feel about the quality of your service-learning classes?**

*Major Themes:*

Instructors/TAs/Coordinators

Need more training in facilitating/leading reflection sessions.

Students prefer instructors who are able to share personal experience of service.

Reflection sessions

Reflection sessions need improvement.

Increased participation from students.

Increased participation/involvement from instructors/TAs/coordinators.

Integration of service-learning component into course

This depends on the class format (separate service-learning section vs. fully integrated into overall curriculum)

There is often no direct relationship between coursework and service.

Students experience some assignments related to service as busy work (not meaningful or encouraging of personal reflection).

Students enjoy when service is specifically tied in to course goals/curriculum in a meaningful way.

Reflection should be integrated into learning process.

Availability of service-learning courses.

Students prefer when service-learning is related to major field/counts toward major.

No service-learning opportunities available in certain majors (Sciences, Art, Pre-professional).

**Question 2: How involved was your faculty in facilitating/managing the service-learning partnerships and reflection activities?**

*Major Themes:*

Students indicated a wide range of faculty involvement from not at all or intensely involved (most seemed to fit one extreme or another).

Service-Learning partnerships

Faculty for larger survey classes usually not involved/interested/minimally involved and rely on TAs

Some faculty presented students with list of established service sites from which to choose – these were well-integrated into curriculum/instructors better informed about site, but not necessarily close to students' own interests.

Some allowed students to seek out service sites – these were not as well-integrated/instructors not as informed about sites, but closer to students' own interests.

#### Reflection Activities

Faculty better able to facilitate deeper reflection/learning when more informed/involved in service activities.

TAs are sometimes not up to date on lecture material being covered.

Faculty involvement/training in facilitating reflection critical to learning experience.

### **Question 3: How strong was the partnership between your service-learning faculty and the community partners?**

#### *Major Themes:*

Faculty often had strong ties with community partners already associated with the course.

These established service-learning sites are often well-integrated into the curriculum.

Staff from these sites were sometimes invited to the class to participate in discussions.

Faculty had minimal/no ties to new partners sought out by students.

These sites provided an opportunity for students to learn how to go through the process of contacting and setting up a contract with community partners.

Balance between strong faculty ties and student interest is difficult to find.

### **Question 4: How explicit were your faculty in teaching civic engagement and responsibility to the community in the classes you had?**

#### *Major Themes:*

Students would have liked more emphasis on these areas in classes.

Not even mentioned/addressed in some classes.

Difficult to address in classes with wide variety of service-learning sites.

Many missed opportunities to address civic engagement and responsibility to community.

Insufficient emphasis on students' impact on/responsibility to population being served through community partner.

Curriculum too overloaded in some classes – not enough time to address these areas.

Students report getting greater emphasis on these areas outside of class through scholars program (ISP).

**Question 5: How would you improve the service-learning classes?**

*Major Themes:*

Greater integration of service-learning into curriculum/coursework.

Address service-learning/civic engagement in class discussions.

Explicitly address expectations/goals/objectives of service-learning courses.

Tie service-learning/community responsibility issues into core curriculum.

More preparation/training of faculty.

Better connection between instructor and service-learning sites.

Better training in facilitating reflection sessions/discussions effectively.

Better training of faculty in addressing issues/problems/concerns related to students' service-learning experiences.

Better training of faculty on service-learning objectives/service-learning model.

More faculty with service-learning experience.

**Recommendations:**

1. In the interest of saving time and obtaining more focused information, it would be best to prep or pre-frame students selected for future focus groups to start thinking about their experiences (both positive and negative) in service-learning classes prior to the start of the actual focus group.
2. A question addressing the quality of faculty preparation/training regarding service-learning (ability to lead/facilitate reflection discussions, level of empathy, knowledge of service-learning objectives, ability/willingness to share personal service experiences, etc.) may be warranted as several student comments involved this issue.
3. Further clarification regarding experiences based on the type of service-learning class(es) taken (service-learning specific course vs. optional service-learning section) and how specifically the service-learning component was integrated into the curriculum would be helpful.
4. A question related to the availability of service-learning classes that fulfill certain requirements (Gen. Ed. or major specific) may help understand students' experience.
5. Additional questions based on service-learning program objectives may be useful in assessing students' experiences.