

Using writing in a service learning project

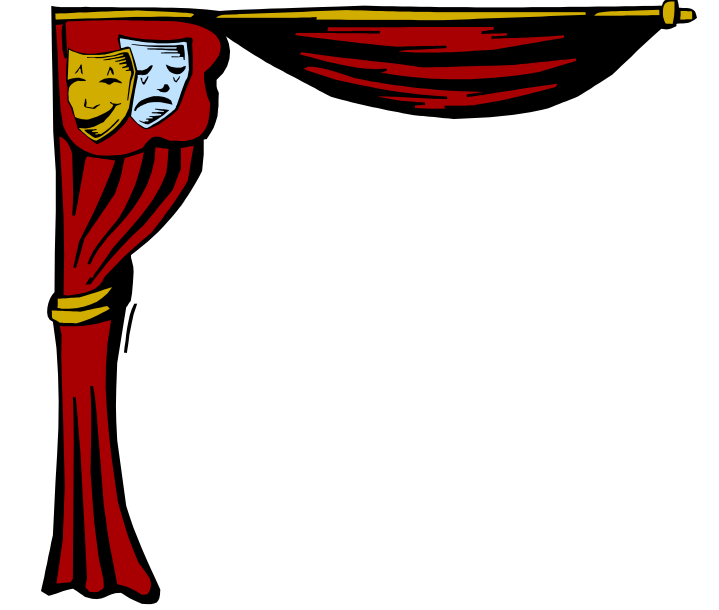
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Service Learning is “meaningful community service that is linked to students’ academic experience through related course materials and reflective activities.” --Edward Zlotowski, Senior Faculty Fellow at Campus Compact and leading proponent of service learning

How can faculty use writing assignments to help students have a successful service learning experience?

- *in the spotlight*, students create useful, professional documents for a local non-profit organization
- *behind the scenes*, students reflect on their service learning work.

This poster shares what I've learned over 10 years of teaching a service-learning component in a professional writing class.



Writing in the spotlight

Helping students create professional-quality documents.

• Connect to a Community Partner

Before the term begins

- Seek a non-profit organization in our neighborhood that needs to have documents written or revised
- Enlist help of campus service-learning coordinator to find potential matches for project
- Determine fit
 - do their needs match the scope of course?
 - do they have someone willing to be contact person for students?

• Learn about the organization

As part of the course, students

- study and write about organization’s website and other publicly-available documents
- visit the organization for a tour and/or volunteering experience
- meet with contact person for information and brainstorming session
- with the contact person, decide on several documents for class teams to produce.

• Set up writing and rewriting tasks

Course design is set up so that each team

- learns through course materials about the purpose, audience, style, and approach of the type of document they are writing
- writes a proposal for their document
- creates a PERT chart to plan, organize, and keep track of work on document.
- uses class time to meet with team, coordinate out-of-class work, and work on document
- has clear deadlines for drafts as the document project progresses
- creates a final presentation to the organization about rhetorical choices made in the document

Writing behind the scenes

Helping students reflect on the service learning activity.

“Reflection describes the process of deriving meaning and knowledge from experience and occurs before, during and after a service-learning project. Effective reflection engages both service-learning leaders and participants in a thoughtful and thought-provoking process that consciously connects learning with experience. It is the use of critical thinking skills to prepare for and learn from service experiences.” National Service Learning C (QR code)

• Why have reflective writing assignments for service learning projects?

They help students

- examine critical issues related to service-learning project
- understand the connection between service learning and classroom work
- develop civic values
- find personal relevance in the work

• When should students do reflective assignments?

Before, during, and after the service-learning project to allow for feedback from instructor and classmates. See NSLC website for guidance (QR code)

• What kinds of reflective assignments can students do?

- Memo to instructor before project starts
 - summarize non-profit’s core messages on website and other materials
 - self-report: past experience with non-profits, outside of campus, etc.
- Online forums as work progresses
- mid-term memo on group’s progress, obstacles
- Final memo
 - connections between course work and service-learning
 - analysis of collaboration
 - what was satisfying, what was more difficult than expected
 - summary/comments on student’s first memo