

What is Service-Learning:

There are many definitions of service-learning, often depending on the resource cited. Below are some of the most commonly cited definitions.

The National Center for Service-Learning (1979) defines service-learning through three key characteristics:

- 1) Service-learning constitutes activity that is focused on meeting a human need in the community where that need has to do with the well-being of individuals and/or of the environment in which they live.
- 2) Key academic and/or civic objectives to be achieved through combining service with learning have been identified prior to the activity.
- 3) Opportunities for students to reflect on their experience and its connection to specific academic/civic objectives are incorporated into the activity.

According to the National Commission on Service learning, service-learning:

- Links to academic content and standards
- Involves young people in helping to determine and meet real, defined community needs
- Is reciprocal in nature, benefiting both the community and the service providers by combining a service experience with a learning experience
- Can be used in any subject area so long as it is appropriate to learning goal
- Works at all ages, even among young children

They also state that service-learning is not:

- An episodic volunteer program
- An add-on to an existing school or college curriculum
- Logging a set number of community service hours in order to graduate
- Compensatory service assigned as a form of punishment by the courts or by school administrators
- Only for high school or college students
- One-sided: benefiting only students or only the community

Please visit the [National Service-Learning Clearinghouse website](#) for other definitions and characteristics of service-learning.

Many people often question how service-learning is different from things like volunteer experiences or internships. As long as the service experience fits the three characteristics outlined by the National Center for Service-Learning the experience should be considered service-learning, whether it is called such or called something else.

For more information on the academic differentiation of these experiences please refer to the following resources:

[National Service-Learning Clearing House glossary of service-learning terms](#)

[Louisiana Campus Compact: Definitions](#) (Based on Andrew Furco's work: "Service-Learning: A Balanced Approach to Experiential Education")

["Service-Learning: A Balanced Approach to Experiential Education"](#) by: Andrew Furco

Resources

1. National Center for Service Learning. (1979). Three Principles of Service-Learning. *Synergy*.
2. National Service-Learning Clearinghouse. (date unknown). Service-Learning Is... . Retrieved August 8, 2006 from http://servicelearning.org/welcome_to_service-learning/service-learning_is/index.php .