

Establishing and Maintaining Community Partnerships for Service-learning

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Presentation Overview

- Mindset: Partnership vs. Placement
- Identify instructional objectives
- Identify potential community partners
- Courtship → Partnership
- First Class Session
- On-going communication
- Evaluation and Celebration

Reframing our Mindset

- Placement vs. Partnership
- Placement...
 - Placement connotes “dropping off” a student
 - Roles and relationships not always clear
 - Focus is on student/class benefit/outcome

Partnerships

- Parity in decision-making
- Recognizing and utilizing expertise of agency partner to enhance & enrich
- Mutual benefit & addressing mutual need
- Clarify roles and mutual support
- On-going communication
- Collaboration vs. “exploitation”
- Authentic setting vs. “lab”

Identifying Instructional Objectives

- What do you hope your students will gain from the learning experience?
 - Professional development
 - Application of skill
 - Personal development
 - Civic engagement/development
- How and will a service-learning experience in an authentic setting facilitate this?
- How will you know if your goals were met and if the learning took place?

Identifying Potential Community Partners

- Professional knowledge
- Networking with colleagues
- Check the phone book
- Make a list
- Contact them to set up a site visit and introductory meeting
 - Overture & gesture of good will
 - Scope out the site

Questions, Questions, Questions

- How many sites do I need?
 - How many students are there?
 - What can the agency handle?
 - What is flexibility & proximity of the agency?
 - How many can YOU manage?
 - Multiple vs. single site (my own experience)
- Do students choose agency or do I choose?*
- Don't turn them loose! (horror stories)
- Provide a menu for students to choose from!!!
- Are you overwhelming limited community agencies?

Keep In Mind...

- You are meeting THEIR needs as well as your needs
- You should not be making more work for them
- You are making sure they get something out of it, too
- Culture-shock → they are in survival mode and they don't understand academia
- So the courtship process begins...

Courtship:

Is this a meaningful relationship or will we part as just good friends?

- Ask about their mission/needs → perhaps your students/class can help
- Explain your course and student level of experience/expertise
- Bring your syllabus & go over it
- Emphasize the academics & avoid “volunteering”
- Think/explore beyond direct service
 - Research, policy, interviews, material development
- Explain weekly expectations & timelines (2 to 3 hrs a week or “bookends”) + school calendar
- (continued)

Courtship Continued

- Identify a project(s) that works in the timeframe & student skill level***
- Identify number of students needed and when
- Identify site point-person for oversight
- Be sure there is on-site student orientation
- Articulate communication channels
- Check for liability and/or background checks
- Explore their roles: Guest speaker? Evaluation? Conduct reflection?
- They write up an abstract or description of agency and project
- Create a contract/covenant – remember...you or they can always say “no”)

Covenant or Contract

- All 3 parties sign & copies distributed/kept
- Articulate...
 - Expectations (professional, project, ethics)
 - Time commitment
 - Contingency/arrange alternatives
 - Communication channels

Learning Curves

- Initially...this up-front work is time consuming
- With the investment of time and energy, you create long-lasting RELATIONSHIPS to build upon and saves time and energy in the long run
- Later, you have “short-hand” conversations

First Class Session

- Introduce service-learning and de-bunk the “V” word & mentality
- Invite partners to class to provide overview
 - Provide map and parking pass
 - Distribute project abstract
 - Dog & Pony show
 - Q & A Session (hours, flexibility)
 - Agency mission and project expectations
 - Students sign up & complete/submit covenant

On-Going Communication

- Provide contact information to partner and encourage them to seek you out
- RESPOND when they do contact you!
- Initial check-in on how things are going
- Mid-semester phone check-in (more)
- Good, Bad, & Ugly
 - Things are great!
 - Oh-oh...a heads up → we need to talk!
 - The “meltdown”

Phone Check-in

- 2 to 3 minutes
- 3 to 4 questions with “Likert” rating response
 - What level of quality has student completed tasks?
 - What level of professional behavior has the student demonstrated?
 - How prompt/dependable is the student?
 - Do you have any comments or concerns at this time?

Other Roles

- Guest presentation in class
- Conduct/facilitate reflection sessions
- Serve on advisory boards
- Come to student presentations at end of the semester
- Consider co-authoring research or co-present at conferences

Evaluation

- Student Evaluation
 - Rating or grading of student performance
 - Project or product was completed/useful
 - Rating satisfaction with product
- Agency Evaluation
 - Would students recommend using this site again?
 - Input & support from point-person?

Celebration

- End of class celebration
- Annual meeting for discussion/input
- Thank you notes and/or small gifts

Questions & Discussion