

Defining Service-Learning

Since Robert Sigmon's seminal article "Service-learning: Three Principles" (1979) helped to establish and formalize the pedagogy, individuals, as well as programs and institutions, have created numerous definitions for "service-learning." Although specific understandings vary, as the field has grown and matured, the range of definitions has begun to converge on several core characteristics of service-learning. A few oft-cited definitions include:

Service-learning is a "course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility."

~ Bringle, R., Hatcher, J., & McIntosh, R. *Analyzing Morton's Typology of Service Paradigms and Integrity*. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, Fall 2006, Vol 13, No. 1.

Service-learning is a "method under which students... learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that: is conducted in and meets the needs of a community and is coordinated with... an institution of higher education...and with the community; helps foster civic responsibility; is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students... and includes structured time for the students...to reflect on the service experience."

~ *National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993*.

"Service-learning is the various pedagogies that link community service and academic study so that each strengthens the other. The basic theory of service-learning is Dewey's: the interaction of knowledge and skills with experience is key to learning... Learning starts with a problem and continues with the application of increasingly complex ideas and increasingly sophisticated skills to increasingly complicated problems."

~ Thomas Ehrlich, in: *Barbara Jacoby and Associates. Service-Learning in Higher Education: Concepts and Practices*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1996.

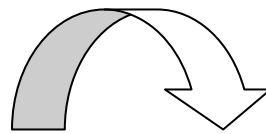
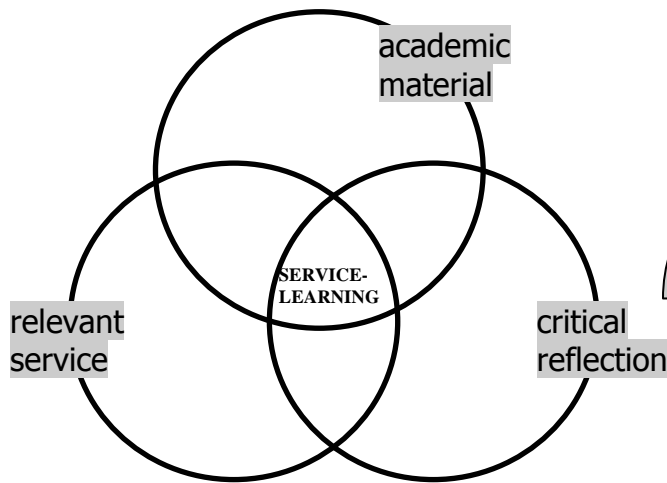
Consensus on the essential elements of the pedagogy:

- integration of learning goals and service goals
- academic learning goals supplemented with at least civic learning goals and maybe other categories of learning as well (e.g., personal growth, professional development, multi-cultural learning, ethical inquiry)
- organized, structured process
- reciprocal (or, mutually-transformative) collaboration among students, faculty/staff, community members, and institution that fulfills shared objectives and builds capacity among all partners
- structured reflection
- duration and intensity sufficient to produce meaningful learning and service outcomes

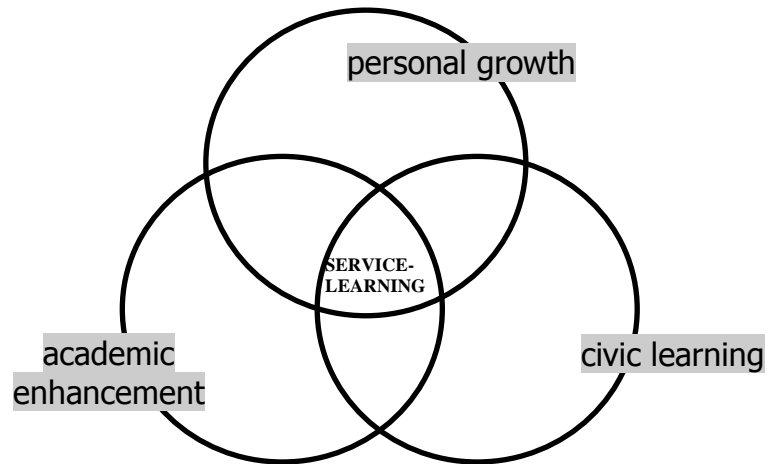
A Graphic Representation of Service-Learning

Service-learning (S-L) is a collaborative teaching and learning strategy designed to promote academic enhancement, personal growth, and civic learning. Students render meaningful service in community settings that present them with experiences related to academic material. Through guided reflection, students—individually and in groups—examine their experiences critically and articulate specific learning outcomes, thus enhancing the quality of their learning and of their service.

Components of S-L



Learning Goals of S-L



Partners in S-L

