

From Biodiesel to Drug Rehab: Service Across Disciplines

Presented by:

Tracy Lai, M.Ed., History faculty, Seattle Central Community College
Kayleen Oka, Ph. D., Sociology faculty, Seattle Central Community College
Katie Gagnon, Ph. D., Science faculty, Seattle Central Community College

(Augmented by a presentation by Denise Vaughn, M. Ed., Basic and Transitional Studies, Seattle Central Community College)

General description of the session

How does one help students connect their service-learning to their course? Does each discipline have its own tools? Meet with the service-learning coordinator and faculty from different disciplines at Seattle Central Community College to share methods that guide reflections written by students from varied backgrounds, including international, English as a second language, college transfer.

Tracy Lai, history faculty, is interested in how service-learning assists students in their exploration and understanding of history and historical methods. She will share assessment and reflection tools which help students to identify the skills and knowledge that they have gained through service-learning, as well as how to make connections to their history courses.

Kayleen Oka, sociology faculty, will illustrate one way to get students engaged in reflecting upon their service learning experience. Grouping students in several ways throughout the term, Kayleen uses reflective questions to get students thinking about their service and connecting it to both the classroom learning and their own personal development. She will also share a grading rubric that she utilizes for the service learning in her sociology course.

Katie Gagnon, science faculty, uses a combined service and research project to aid

students' depth of understanding regarding one environmental issue. The research incorporates information literacy and a series of reflections in order to help develop an environmental ethic. Guided reflections are assigned during the term and are included in students' final service and research paper, as well as conveyed during a poster presentation.

Denise Vaughn, ESL faculty, offers service-learning as an option for her students in an advanced writing course. She will discuss how this component fits in with the rest of the course. In particular, she will discuss how students gain valuable work experience that is applicable to their college majors. Through writing and reflection, students demonstrate a deepening understanding of American life and culture, and thus expand cultural competency.

Motivations/foundations for the session

In her capacity as Service-Learning Coordinator, Patti Gorman has an overview of campus-wide implementation of the service-learning pedagogy. She has noted that faculty in different disciplines pose different reflection questions to their students, employ different classroom reflection strategies, and use different reflection assignments. She was struck by the various and unique methods for eliciting student reflections. Some are particularly useful to certain disciplines; some have interdisciplinary usefulness. Not only did she want to share these differences with others in a conference format, but she found that when she started talking about her observations with faculty from different disciplines, cross fertilization began to occur. The interdisciplinary exchanges that occurred were exciting.

Understanding what is to be achieved at the session

One goal of this workshop is to strengthen facilitation of the reflection process and offer tools that participants may take with them to use in their curriculum. This addresses the prompts or discussion questions one gives students. A second goal is to develop techniques for evaluating multiple expressions of reflection.

Other information for participants

In order to take service-learning forward on the campus of Seattle Central Community College, we are in the process of developing a 5-credit service-learning course, one that will explore the value of service and civic engagement, as well as engage students in service in the community.

Brown bag sessions for faculty will continue to spread the word about service-learning and will foster cross-disciplinary and intra-disciplinary sharing of what works and what doesn't.

Last year we held a Community Involvement Fair that brought agency representatives to campus to meet students, followed by a reception for faculty and agency reps. It was so successful that we plan to continue to use this as one way to promote service-learning.

We plan to ask the campus student association to hold a civic engagement symposium.

By working together to plan for this conference workshop session, the service-learning coordinator and faculty found themselves revising their use of the pedagogy.

In summation, the notions of reflection and retention, whether it be retention of knowledge or retention of students, seem to have a deep connection that we can foster by offering campus in-service experiences.