

# Preparing Students for Service Learning

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## Session Description

Engaging students in effective service learning experiences that benefit all stakeholders requires preparation. In this interactive session, participants will gain strategies for preparing students for service by increasing their knowledge and awareness of themselves, of the organization, people and community in which they will serve, and of the link between the course learning objectives and their service.

## Motivations/Foundations for the Session

From 1996-2000 I served as the Faculty Coordinator for the required service learning course, "Introduction to Service in Multicultural Communities" at California State University Monterey Bay. The purpose of the course was to prepare students to enter, participate in, and exit communities respectfully and effectively.

Collaborative groups of faculty, student leaders and community partners identified four competencies that were critical to effective student service—self-reflection, cultural awareness, responsiveness to community-identified needs and assets, and reciprocity. See <http://service.csumb.edu/faculty/sample-syllabi.html> for current information about this course. Our belief was that if students were well prepared for community service through this introductory course, not only would they be more effective in the community that semester, but they would be more effective in the required major-based service learning course they would go on to take as a junior or senior. Ideally, after engaging in at least two service learning courses in their undergraduate years, students would become active, contributing members of their communities throughout their lives.

This session will explore four major components of the student preparation process—the service learner themselves, the community, the service learning process, and the content of the service project/tasks.

## Session Goals

By the end of this session, participants will have discussed some of the critical components of service learning preparation and learned curricular activities and strategies for increasing student learning of

- themselves (their motivations for service, their cultural identities, their assets and talents, their assumptions)
- the agency, people, and community where they will be of service
- the content and process for the service tasks/projects in which they will be involved and
- the relationship between the course learning objectives and their service.

## Summary of Key Points

Participants will reflect on service learning courses they teach and identify the following

### Preparation for Engaging in Service Learning Pedagogy

What preparation do students need to be able to link the course outcomes with their service experience (reflection skills)? How can they bring their service experience into the classroom? How can they apply their classroom learning to improve the quality of their service in the community? In what larger social issues will the course and/or the service engage them?

### Preparation for Understanding the Community

What do students need to understand about the community, the agency, and the people who use the services? What is the agency's role in the larger community?

### Preparation for Bringing Themselves into the Community

What do students need to be aware of about themselves to be effective in the classroom and in the community, e.g.

- their learning style/reflection style(s),
- ways in which their abilities/disabilities, age, class, gender, language(s) race, sexual orientation, religious/non-religious affiliation impact their perceptions and behavior
- their experience and/or assumptions about the community
- their experience and motivations for service

### Preparation for the Tasks/Project

How will you assist students in identifying the experience, skills and assets they bring to the type of service they will be engaged in? Why does a need for volunteers exist relevant to that task/project? How is it situated in a larger social context? What methods have been most effective in addressing the issue(s) at hand?

### Summary of Activities

In addition to reflection and small group dialogue on the above questions, participants will be introduced to a series of activities that have been used in service learning courses to prepare students. They include:

- The article "Helping, Fixing, and Serving" by Rachel Naomi Remen and a reflection worksheet where students examine this framework in the context of their own experience. This is a way for students to compare models and motivations for being of service and the possible impact of each.  
(<http://www.shambhalasun.com/Archives/Columnists/Remen/RemenSep99.htm>)
- A sample student journal that provides an opportunity for students to strengthen their skills in reflective writing and in recognizing assumptions.
- Methods for learning about a community including a respectful community scan.
- Methods for reflecting on their cultural identities (age, gender, class, race, etc.) in relation to people with whom they will be serving.

Workshop participants will also have the opportunity to share their best practices for preparing students in various disciplinary contexts.

### Reflections and Future Directions

If service learning is truly to benefit all partners, significant preparation for all is essential. While this workshop will focus on preparation for students, preparation for faculty and community partners are also critical. This workshop has been presented in a variety of formats from 2 hours to five days. Please contact the presenter for more information.