

California State University Service Learning Definition and Taxonomy (April 2016)

DEFINITION

Service learning...promotes student learning through active participation in meaningful and planned service experiences in the community that are substantively related to course content. Through reflective activities, students enhance their understanding of course content, general knowledge, sense of civic responsibility, self-awareness and commitment to the community.

Service-Learning Course: An academic course (in any discipline) that provides students opportunities to participate in organized service activities that meet community needs while linking the community service experiences to the course content. This makes service learning a very different experience than community service.

[Source: [CSU Center for Community Engagement \(2011\). A Resource Guide for Managing Risk in Service Learning, p. 4](#)]

TAXONOMY: ATTRIBUTES OF A SERVICE LEARNING COURSE

SL Course Attributes	Low Intensity	Medium Intensity	High Intensity
<p>1) Reciprocity Between University & Community</p> <p>Reciprocal partnerships and processes shape the community activities and course design.</p>	<p>The instructor contacts a community organization to host students and provides a brief overview of the course (e.g., learning outcomes, syllabus) and the purposes of the community project.</p>	<p>The instructor meets with the community partner(s) to discuss the course (e.g., preparation/orientation of students, learning outcomes, syllabus), and to identify how the community project can enrich student learning and benefit the organization.</p>	<p>The instructor collaborates with and learns from the community partner(s) as co-educator(s) in various aspects of course planning and design (e.g., learning outcomes, readings, preparation/orientation of students, reflection, assessment) and together they identify how the community project can enrich student learning and add to the capacity of the organization.</p>
<p>2) Academically Relevant Community Involvement</p> <p>Community involvement is relevant to and integrated with the discipline-based academic content and assignments.</p>	<p>The instructor includes a community project as an added component of the course but it is not integrated with academic content or assignments. The syllabus does not address the purposes of the community project.</p>	<p>The instructor utilizes the community project as a “text” to provide additional insight into student understanding of academic content and enhance student’s ability to complete assignments. The syllabus describes the relationship of the community project to learning outcomes.</p>	<p>The instructor integrates the community project and relevant social issue(s) as critical dimensions for student understanding of academic content which significantly enhance student’s ability to complete assignments. The syllabus provides a strong rationale for the relationship of the community project to learning outcomes.</p>
<p>3) Explicit Civic Learning Goals</p> <p>Civic learning goals are explicitly articulated and develop students’ capacities to address critical social issues.</p>	<p>Instructor makes vague reference to civic learning goals in the syllabus. There is only limited reference to the underlying social issues to be examined.</p>	<p>Instructor identifies specific civic learning outcomes that complement the discipline-based academic content. The civic learning assists students to understand underlying social issues.</p>	<p>Instructor highlights civic learning goals in a clear and holistic way that are integrated with the discipline-based academic content. Students gain knowledge, skills, values and dispositions relevant to addressing underlying systemic issues of inequity and injustice.</p>

SL Course Attributes	Low Intensity	Medium Intensity	High Intensity
<p>4) Reflection Facilitates Learning</p> <p>Critical reflection activities and assignments integrate classroom and community learning.</p>	<p>Instructor asks students, on a limited basis, to create reflective products about the community project, usually at the end of the semester.</p>	<p>Instructor structures reflection activities and products about the community project that connect the experience to academic and civic content, require moderate analysis, lead to new action, and provide ongoing feedback to the student throughout the semester.</p>	<p>Instructor and community partner(s) collaborate to build student capacity to critically reflect and develop products that explore the relevance of the experience to academic content, use critical thinking to analyze social issues, recognize systems of power, lead to new action, and provide ongoing feedback to support student learning.</p>
<p>5) Integrated Assessment of Student Learning</p> <p>Student learning assessment addresses both the discipline-based and civic learning goals, and includes learning from community involvement.</p>	<p>Learning assessment is largely based on the discipline-based content; some credit is given for completion of the community involvement component of the course.</p>	<p>Learning assessment articulates varying levels of expectations for both the discipline-based and civic learning aspects of the course. Community partner provides generic feedback on student performance.</p>	<p>Learning assessment holistically addresses both discipline-based and civic learning outcomes, and students are expected to demonstrate competency in both aspects of learning in the course. Community partner provides meaningful feedback on relevant aspects of student learning.</p>
<p>6) Attention to Community Impact</p> <p>Systems exist to assess community impact.</p>	<p>Goals make vague reference to serving the community good. No tools are in place to assess community impact.</p>	<p>Goals for community impact are identified (i.e. organizational capacity, student/client growth, social and economic benefits, etc.). No tools are in place to assess impact.</p>	<p>Goals for community impact are specified and achievable in the context of the course (i.e. organizational capacity, student/client growth, social and community benefits, etc.). Instructor and community partner have developed tools and systems to collect data and communicate insights on impact.</p>

NOTE: This taxonomy was developed by the California State University Service Learning Directors, through support of the CSU Center for Community Engagement (<http://www.calstate.edu/cce/>). This document draws on a previous DRAFT taxonomy developed by Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis: <http://csl.iupui.edu/doc/teaching-research-assessment/iupui-sl-taxonomy.pdf>.