

SERVICE-LEARNING:

THE METHODOICAL PHENOMENON IN HIGHER EDUCATION—EMERGING STRONGLY AT SUU



Service-learning, a pedagogical endeavor with a history and firm foundation based on the works of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Kurt Lewin, David Kolb, and L.S. Vygotsky, is a curricular-based educational experience in which students participate in organized service activities that meet both community-identified needs and academic goals. These curricular projects are designed to generate further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. Service-learning experiences always relate to course matter, provide a needed service, and most often, an education to individuals or entities in the community.

In essence, students use concrete learning experiences to help construct their understanding of citizenship. Rather than the addition of service to learning, it is the integration of the two in a process of planning, action and analysis.

SERVICE-LEARNING AT SUU

A recent statewide survey indicates that service-learning is being taught in more than 40 disciplines in the Utah System of Higher Education. More than 50 courses at SUU currently include a service-learning component, (far exceeding the average figure at other USHE institutions), subscribing to the Ernest Boyer model of scholarship that suggests scholarship is not just about pure research; it's about the scholarship of application, discovery, and integration.

Mark Grover, SUU Assistant Professor of Biology, incorporates service-learning into his Conservation Biology course. Students execute critical re-vegetation strategies in the desert tortoise habitat. They assist with surveys of the raptor and pygmy rabbit populations out in the Three Peaks area—information which will be directly linked to land management decisions. They work to protect riparian habitats on the banks of a natural water course where wild horses and cattle also compete for limited forage.

Service-learning is a significant component in the introductory psychology class taught by **Dr. Steve Barney**, SUU Associate Professor of Psychology. For instance, when trying to convey to his students the concept of Confirmation Bias—that is, in layman's



Mark Grover, SUU
Assistant Professor of
Biology



Dr. Steve Barney,
SUU Associate Professor
of Psychology



Earl Mulderink,
Associate Professor of
History

"Service-Learning is most certainly interrelated into SUU's Mission and Core Values Statements. It is part of our philosophy and function, and on its way to becoming a vital part of our campus culture."

— **Earl Mulderink**

terms, determining why you believe what you believe—Barney assigns his students to identify their prejudices. Then they must submerge themselves in a situation surrounded by these prejudices—thus the service-learning component. For example, if a student discovers she has issues with homeless people, she may find herself serving this group lunch for a month at the local soup kitchen. The exercise, Barney states, “really helps students get what they want out of learning, and out of life.” The objective, he expounds, is to produce civically-minded, civically-engaged students by learning as they’re doing. “I am trying,” Barney admits, “to make the world a better place, one general psychology student at a time.”

SUU SERVICE-LEARNING SCHOLARS

The Service-Learning Scholar program (through the Service-Learning Center) is for students who are particularly serious about their service-learning credentials and their intent to market these skills in the career world. The basis of the program is to act, by taking what one has learned in the classroom and applying it to a community need.

An example of a Service-Learning Scholar’s endeavor would be a chemistry student who tests homes of low-income families for lead-based paint. When houses test positive, a project is organized to re-paint the houses to acceptable safety levels. VITA—Volunteer Income Tax Assistance—where business students process simple income tax forms for people in the community, for free, is another excellent example of service-learning. Service-Learning Scholars complete coursework for credit, and a considerable number of hours of community service.

Having just completed its first year, SUU’s Service-Learning Scholar program already has 10-12 students registered; 10 just graduated with honors last May. Proportionately speaking, in comparison to other Utah institutions, SUU has one of the higher rates of participation in its service-

learning program. Several reputable schools have a functioning Service-Learning Scholar program in place, like the University of Utah and Harvard. **Earl Mulderink**, Associate Professor of History, and SUU’s Faculty Coordinator of Service-Learning and Civic Engagement says, “I surmise that a Service-Learning Scholar program is a growing phenomenon in higher education because of the likelihood of industry looking for, recognizing and rewarding service-learning credentials more strongly in the near future.”

Numerous organizations endorse, incorporate and practice it. The Campus Compact program is a national coalition of more than 950 college and university presidents representing some five million students who are committed to fulfilling the public purposes of higher education. “Utah is the only state in the country in which all institutions of higher education (public and private) are members of the Campus Compact (called the Utah Campus Compact),” Mulderink reports. The link to information about the Utah Campus Compact is <http://www.sa.utah.edu/utahcampuscompact/about.asp>

“What is happening at the state level is exciting,” Mulderink says.

He feels the same of what’s happening at SUU. “Service-Learning is most certainly interrelated into SUU’s Mission and Core Values Statements,”

(<http://www.suu.edu/general/mission.html>)

Mulderink says. “It is part of our philosophy and function, and on its way to becoming a vital part of our campus culture.” **SUU**



Two SUUans Receive State Awards for Service-Learning

The Utah Campus Compact organization held its Annual Recognitions and Awards program in Salt Lake City last Spring, and two individuals from Southern Utah University were honored. *Joleen Kremin* ('06 Accounting), along with *Cindy Wright*, Professor of Human Nutrition, were recognized as an Outstanding Student and Engaged Faculty, respectively, in light of their efforts toward promoting service-learning in Utah.



Joleen Kremin



Cindy Wright