

Implementing service learning in gerontology-related courses: A hybrid approach

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Resource Exchange

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Course Title: Applied Health Promotion for an Aging Population

Purpose of this resource exchange: Service learning is an invaluable pedagogical tool that enhances students' comprehension of course material and provides them with practical, hands-on experience. Finding the time to complete service learning hours, however, is a challenge faced by many students, posing a barrier for faculty who would like to use this strategy in their courses. This resource exchange discusses how to overcome this obstacle by using a hybrid format and includes materials that can be modified for use by attendees of the session.

Course structure: *This was a hybrid course: students met in class one week and online the next. Structuring the course in this manner allowed students the flexibility needed to complete their service learning hours. Below is a copy of the syllabus, which shows how the course was structured:*

Wk.	Dates/Meeting (OI: Online instruction; CI: Classroom instruction)	Lecture Topics	Weekly Chapters (to be read <u>prior</u> to class)	Assignments (due on scheduled day) <i>Additional readings noted in italics</i>
1	8.27 (CI)	Course overview; Introduction	1	
2	9.3 (OI)	Clinical Preventive Services	2	Update your TITANium profile
3	9.10 (CI)	Health Educators: Collaboration and Communication & Health Behavior Change	3	<i>Read: Stokols, 1996</i>
4	9.17 (OI)	Exercise	4	
5	9.24 (CI)	EXAM 1		
6	10.1 (OI)	Nutrition and Weight Management	5	
7	10.8 (CI)	Complementary and Alternative Medicine	6	
8	10.15 (OI)	Selected Health Education Topics	7	
9	10.22 (CI)	Mental Health/Stress	8	
10	10.29 (OI)	Social Support/Long-Term Care; End-of-Life Care	10	
11	11.5 (CI)	EXAM 2		
12	11.12 (OI)	Diversity	11	
13	11.19 (CI)	Community Health	9	Site Summary Presentations
14	11.26	FALL RECESS		
15	12.3 (OI)	Public Health	12	
16	12.10 (CI)	Future Trends	13	Service Learning Portfolios Due
	12.17 (CI)	FINAL EXAM: 5:00-6:50		

Logistics: *How to implement service learning into a hybrid course, step-by-step.*

Step 1: Locate potential service learning sites. I worked with CSUF's Center for Internships and Engagement (CICE) to identify potential sites. It is important to do this in advance of the semester you plan to implement service learning. I located sites over the summer for a fall course.

Step 2: Provide students with a list of the pre-approved sites, with details about the location of each site. I did this for each of the sites so that students had an understanding of what their responsibilities would be prior to signing up for a particular site. Please see below for the information students received prior to signing up for a site:

Facility & Location:

I listed the name of the site, along with its location (this is important because some students have transportation issues).

Student Tasks:

I had each site provide me with a description of the type(s) of tasks students would be asked to complete during their service learning placement.

Special Requirements:

Some sites have certain requirements that students must complete prior to volunteering (e.g., TB testing). Additionally, some sites are looking for students with particular skill-sets (e.g., ability to speak another language). All requirements were listed under this section.

Number of available slots:

All sites let me know in advance the number of slots they had available. Once the maximum was reached, students were required to find an alternate site.

Step 3: After students decided where they would like to complete their service learning, I worked closely with CICE to ensure that they were all officially enrolled in their service learning placement sites. I also provided students with a timesheet to keep track of their hours (note, this was given to them at the start of the class). I've included the timesheet I used in Appendix A.

Step 4: As the semester progressed, students completed their service learning hours (20 for this class). Throughout the course, assignments and discussions tied together course material with students' service learning experiences, culminating into a Service Learning Portfolio (see Appendix B) and an in-class presentation about their experiences. Below is an example of how I structured on-line discussions so that the material reflected their service learning experiences and vice-versa.

“This week, I'd like you all to reflect on your service learning experience as it relates to social support. What types of activities have you participated in (or witnessed) at your service learning site that incorporate social support and/or that reflect what was discussed in lecture or in your book? In your opinion, were these activities effective at improving the well-being of the older adults you work with? If you have not participated in (or witnessed) social support activities at your service learning site, what type of activities would you design to incorporate social support at your site? Why do you think they would be effective?”

The importance of flexibility: One thing to realize when implementing service learning is that there will be hiccups along the way. Stay the course, get assistance from the service learning specialists at your school and check your email frequently so you can help student with any logistical issues!

Appendix B: Sample Student Assignment**Service Learning Portfolio**

Your service learning portfolio must include the following:

A cover page that includes: Your name, course number (HESC 450), semester/year (Fall 2014), name of agency, & the words “Service Learning Portfolio”

Inspirational Quote(s) or Song Lyrics that reflect how you feel about your service learning experience.

Weekly/Monthly log of hours (must be signed by your supervisor).

Summary of your service learning experience. In approximately 3-4 double-spaced page(s), discuss what you did at your service learning site (e.g., the types of activities you assisted with/led). Do you feel that your service learning experience enhanced your understanding of the needs of older adults in our community? Why or why not? Do you feel like it enhanced your understanding of the material presented in class/in the book? Why or why not?

Discussion Board Entries: Throughout the course, you will be asked to reflect upon your service learning experience using the Discussion Board on TITANium. Please provide a copy of these entries in your service learning portfolio.

Reflection Essay: Define and describe two dimensions of wellness that your service-learning site incorporates in their work. For each dimension, provide two examples of activities that are used to promote wellness at your service learning site. Describe these activities. Do you think these activities are effective? Why or why not? Now, imagine your agency has hired you to incorporate another dimension of wellness in their work. What dimension would you add? Why? Be sure to justify your decision by citing two research articles. Describe two types of activities you would implement in this “newly incorporated” dimension. Your essay should be approximately 3-4 pages (with an additional page for references) and must be written in APA format. Be sure to double-space this essay.

Formatting:

- Font: Please use Times New Roman, 12-point
- Be sure to label each section, using either titles or headers
- Save all sections in one word document; email me your completed word document

-Optional: anything you created during your time such as an activity, handout, etc.

Student Feedback

Areas for improvement:

1. Some sites weren't as hands-on students would have liked
2. Some students experienced poor communication with their site supervisor
3. Some organizations were not well-organized

How students benefitted from service learning:

1. Feeling like they made a difference in the lives of older adults
2. Applying their classroom knowledge to the "real-world"
3. Having a hands-on experience, instead of just reading from a book
4. Gaining a better understanding of the needs of the community and of older adults, in particular
5. Understanding the importance of doing what we can in our youth to age as well as we
6. Seeing the joy they brought to the lives of older adults living in our community

In conclusion:

Time constraints can be a factor for faculty who are debating whether to incorporate service learning into their classes. With the use of a hybrid format, however, faculty can overcome this barrier and use a strong, effective pedagogical tool for students to not only process the material more deeply, but have a better understanding of the needs of older adults in their community and how they can work to meet them.