

## A Faculty-Friendly Framework for Improving Teaching and Learning through Service-Learning

Belinda Deal  
The University of Texas at Tyler

Melinda Hermanns  
The University of Texas at Tyler

Colleen Marzilli  
The University of Texas at Tyler

Rebecca Fountain  
Capella University

Kouider Mokhtari  
The University of Texas at Tyler

Rochell R McWhorter  
The University of Texas at Tyler

Service-learning (SL) is increasingly being adopted into higher education programs (Deck, Conner, & Cambron, 2017). In the review of the literature regarding SL and its impact on teaching and learning, the authors found both positives and negatives. The authors found that higher education faculty have a good working knowledge of SL and how it can be used to enhance teaching and learning. Indeed, ample resources exist including a clearinghouse on SL (National Service-learning Clearinghouse, 2016); several journals devoted to the dissemination of SL policy, research, and best practice findings; as well as an array of how-to resources that provide guidance to faculty who wish to incorporate SL projects and activities in their higher education courses.

Unfortunately, higher education faculty, for various reasons, do not always take advantage of the resources available to improve teaching and learning through SL. Sivalingam and Yunus (2017) noted that service-learning provides a platform that connects the real-world, community-based experiences necessary for 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. While faculty may view such learning approaches as effective, they may not employ them in their classrooms.

Service-learning has been defined in various ways by numerous experts in the field. These definitions share important core ingredients, which emphasize the

### Abstract

This manuscript highlights benefits of service-learning (SL) as a promising pedagogical approach to improving teaching and learning in college classrooms. Drawing on the collective experiences of integrating SL projects in university courses, the authors share a framework aimed at assisting faculty in higher education in designing, implementing, and evaluating SL projects across diverse higher education courses. A case example illustrating how SL projects can be infused in a graduate course is offered, and recommendations are provided for faculty who wish to integrate SL projects with the goal of improving teaching and learning in their college courses.

application of what students learn in the classroom to solving critical challenges, issues, or problems in the real-world. One of the most commonly used definitions adopted by faculty in higher education comes from the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (2016), is a publicly funded resource. Seifer and Connors (2007) define SL as:

A teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. Service-learning is a structured learning experience that combines community service with preparation and reflection. Service-learning provides college and university students with a 'community context' to their education, allowing them to connect their academic coursework to their roles as citizens. (p. 5).

For purposes of this manuscript, SL is defined as an approach to teaching that meaningfully integrates classroom instruction with practical community service. This approach to teaching promotes student engagement in learning through critical thinking and reflection while encouraging a heightened sense of civic engagement and personal responsibility.

#### Benefits of Service-Learning

Research indicates that students who engage in SL projects that allow them to collaborate, work on authentic problems, and engage with the community do better academically than students who participate in conventional lecture-based classrooms (Flinders, 2013; Hart, 2018; Lee, Blackwell, Drake, & Moran, 2014; McWhorter, Delello, & Roberts, 2016). These benefits extend to faculty as well, as it provides them with opportunities for greater collaboration and teamwork with students and community partners. It is important for faculty to frame efforts in service-learning as an opportunity for students to engage in meaningful interactions with those from other cultures and communities (Watson & Reiersen, 2017). They further recommend that a culture of inquiry should be fostered to encourage students to think about their own process of thinking while engaged in their work, and to monitor their own understanding and progress toward learning goals.

Loes and Pascarella (2017) reported that student engagement, especially engagement outside of the classroom, significantly affects the development of critical thinking and collaborative learning. In other words, engagement with people and situations that are different are positively associated with critical thinking skills growth. Additionally, in their meta-analyses of research on how higher education affects students, they report that most of the evidence about how to improve critical thinking skills is beyond the scope of what faculty do in the classroom. These findings are supported by researchers who found that the most important motivator for students is when they know they are learning content and skills that will be important in life (Brail, 2016).

Deck, Conner, and Cambron (2017) noted the positive impact of SL on students' understanding of social issues, personal insight, a connection from research to practice, and an understanding of curriculum integration. The students' frame of reference used to guide decision making in complex social issues as well as their individual perception

of self were changed in regards caring for a vulnerable population. Students' cognitive abilities were further developed as they had an increase in self-efficacy.

The above findings are consistent with the Boyer Model of Scholarship (1990), which encourages faculty to engage in various forms of scholarship, including the scholarship of discovery, scholarship of integration, scholarship of application, and scholarship of teaching. Boyer maintained that if universities are to continue advancing forward, a new vision of scholarship is required simply because research alone will not secure the future of higher education, nor the country at large. Boyer argued that while discovery research is central to academic life, faculty also need to engage in the scholarship of integration, the process of making connections within and across disciplines; the scholarship of application, which focuses on discovering how the university can assist with societal challenges, issues, or problems; and, the scholarship of teaching, where students are enlightened to comprehend, synthesize, and make sense of information from the classroom and the real-world. Service-learning provides an opportunity to accomplish this.

#### Development of a Faculty-Friendly Service-Learning Framework

In a review of the literature, various logic models, or frameworks, were available to assist faculty in integrating SL projects across their higher education classrooms (Cone & Harris, 1996; Kolb, 1984). These frameworks differ in various ways depending on the discipline, type of projects, and related matters. For example, Lowery (2006) proposed a logic model to support SL as a community engagement pedagogy. Other logic model examples include a 4-H Citizenship Logic Model-Service by Schillings and Fox (n.d.), that teach about the environment through SL (Jens, 2009), and a model illustrating cooperation between schools and communities using SL (The Rural School and Community Trust, 2004).

For purposes of this manuscript, the authors used insights from existing literature relative to SL to develop a generic framework to assist faculty across the disciplines in designing, implementing, and evaluating SL projects within their programs, curricula, and classrooms. The faculty members proposed a framework also informed by the collective knowledge and experiences with infusing SL projects and activities across various disciplines within diverse courses.

In support of its commitment to SL, the university created a Center for Teaching Excellence and Innovation whose central goal is to advance teaching and learning within the university. Through this SL initiative, the university utilizes a team of Faculty Fellows who provide resources and guidance to foster the development of SL within the university. Faculty members affiliated with different disciplines across the university utilize various SL projects aimed at engaging students, faculty, and members of the community in a mutually beneficial learning experiences.

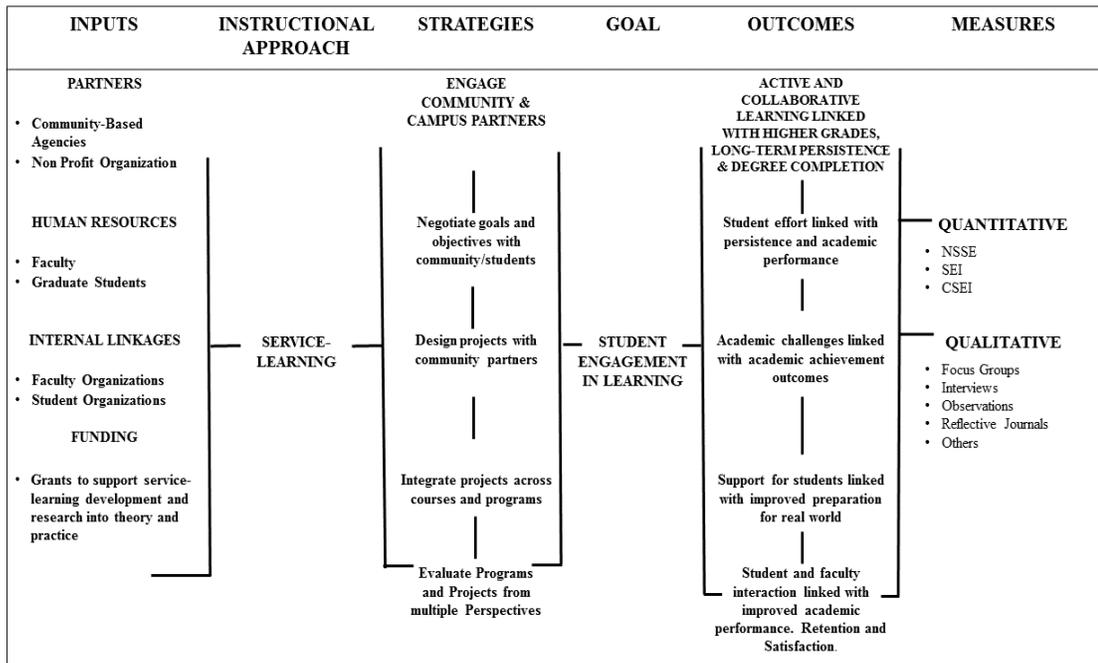
One example of a SL initiative includes undergraduate students enrolled in a Community Health course. The students engaged in indigent care provided by a non-profit, faith-based organization that provides medical care for clients without health care resources. Family nurse practitioner students take this experience to a more complex level as they practice diagnostic skills with a local health care provider at the clinic. In an on-line survey to nursing programs who were members of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, Fountain, Toone, and Deal (2016) found that faith-based

organizations are a valuable community partner for students to observe and participate in the care of a diverse patient population.

Also, a literacy intervention where trained pre-service teacher students enrolled in a reading assessment course served as literacy tutors in a local area school (Mokhtari, Neel, Kaiser, & Le, 2015), and another SL project included a workforce development project where online graduate students volunteered for nonprofit organizations in their community to apply business course knowledge in real-world settings that benefit both students and organizations served.

The framework, depicted in Figure 1, provides an outline of inputs, instructional approaches, strategies, goals, desired outcomes, and suggested associated measures.

Figure 1. A Framework for Infusing Service-Learning in Higher Education



The proposed framework is designed to be flexible to allow faculty to design service-learning projects that best fit their discipline, instructional approach, and other idiosyncrasies. In the next section of the manuscript, the authors provide an example of the application of the framework in a graduate business course in higher education. This framework could then be used to infuse SL projects across various higher education classrooms.

### Case Example

To demonstrate the utility of the SL Framework (see Figure 1), the authors will provide a case example. One graduate business course on workforce development in a regional university in the southwest USA is the context of the case. The students completed a module on SL that included volunteer hours in their community. The purpose was to engage students in an online course using a SL model. This would focus on giving back to the community so students were able to gain knowledge as to how non-profits are volunteer-driven and need appropriately trained volunteers, a parallel application to human resources development, and the focus of the course. A

growing number of business schools are turning to SL as an educational pedagogy, and an opportunity to connect business students to the community is highly valued (Snell et al., 2015; Holmlund, Kowalkowski, & Biggemann, 2016). The case study below highlights six components of the SL framework, which help guide the infusion of SL across higher education courses.

#### Inputs

This case example involved pairing a total of 31 nonprofit organizations in the community selected by the graduate students. Because the course was taught online, the students' "community" was defined by the geographical community where each of the graduate students resided. Therefore, the primary inputs for this case study are the nonprofit organizations chosen by the graduate students for their SL experience. Each student proposed the organization, conducted background research including meeting with the volunteer coordinator, and kept a log of their activities at the nonprofit organization.

**Instructional approaches.** For this course, SL was the chosen instructional approach. SL is a form of experiential instruction where students have a sense of belonging, develop competencies, and promote civic responsibility with benefits to the broader social, economic, and political contexts (Sabo et al., 2015).

**Strategies.** In this case, the graduate students selected a non-profit organization in their community, met with their organization, and together defined the objectives that would be accomplished. The student then completed a three-page proposal template that included the background of the community partner, proof of their nonprofit status, stated the objectives the volunteer coordinator agreed upon, and included a timeline of completing a minimum of 25 hours during a 4-week window of time given by the course instructor. This comprised 30% of the overall grade in the course. Figure 2 depicts the description of the project as outlined in the course syllabus.

Figure 2. Service-Learning Assignment Described in Course Syllabus

**Service Learning Project (30%).** Many non-profit organizations rely heavily on service work from volunteers. Also, many companies value social responsibility initiatives. In this course, each student will choose and gain approval for performing at least **25 hours** of service in their community. Before actual service is performed, student will do "pre-work" including thoroughly researching the organization, their past and current needs for volunteers and then student will complete the "preliminary service learning proposal" for approval prior to any service performed. Once approved by instructor, students will be given designated release time for performing their service learning experience. Afterward, the student will write a summary and reflection of their experiences and relate it to workforce development. The report will be uploaded into Blackboard (30%)

**Goal, Outcomes, and Measures.** The instructor defined the primary goal of the SL project to be student engagement and persistence in completing the online graduate

course which aligned with the framework (see Figure 1). In addition, the focus on outcomes was centered on (1) student learning for real-world applications such as networking with leaders at the non-profit organization that provided additional support for student learning, (2) developed understanding of training methods for volunteers which are the workforce in a non-profit organization, and (3) overall satisfaction with the course. The primary measure of the identified outcomes of the course were students' SL project reports and reflection logs. See Table 1 depicting the application of the framework to this graduate business course.

Faculty Reflection. The faculty member who designed the SL project related that they were pleased with the overall design and outcomes of the project and were a good fit for the course. One area for improvement that the faculty member planned for the following semester was a personalized email to the volunteer coordinator at the non-profit organization describing the project and providing contact information to them in the event there were questions or concerns about the new initiative sponsored by the regional university. All feedback received from the nonprofit community partners would be assessed to determine if further revisions to the project might be needed.

Table 1. Application of the Service-Learning Framework to Community-Based Projects in Three University Colleges

Inputs	Instructional Approaches	Strategies	Goals	Outcomes	Measures
Nonprofit Organizations	Service Learning	Collaborating with a community organization on improving the quality of life for all citizens.	Student Engagement in Learning	Various mutual benefits for students and community members	Qualitative and quantitative measures
A Local Faith-based organization working in collaboration with the university's College of Nursing & Human Sciences	Community-based health services	Community health undergraduate students observe indigent care provided by a faith-based organization. Family Nurse Practitioner students work alongside healthcare workers to provide care.	Student Engagement in Learning  Exposure to health care delivery in different environments	Gaining real-world experience in providing health care services to client's without insurance and resources	Enhanced knowledge and skills re: indigent care for community nursing students. Improved health outcomes for clients without health care resources.
A local area school partnering with the university's School of Education	In-school literacy tutoring	University trained pre-service teachers enrolled in a reading assessment course serve as literacy tutors in local area school.	Student Engagement in Learning	Gaining practical experiences in diagnosing reading problems and designing instruction aimed at addressing these problems.	Enhanced instructional practices for tutors. Improved reading and writing skills for early grade students.
A non-profit community organization working in collaboration with the university's College of Business & Technology	Service-Learning	Volunteering to experience life in a non-profit organization		Gaining real-world applications; networking with non-profit organization leaders.	Enhanced awareness of how non-profit organizations work for graduate students. Free labor for non-profit organization.

## Recommendations

Service-learning involves 'learning through doing' and has many benefits. The authors proposed a faculty friendly framework, *A Logic Model for Infusing Service-learning in Higher Education* that can be used in a variety of courses or for projects to accomplish desired outcomes through SL. Based on this experience, the authors identified four recommendations.

**Recommendation #1. *Clearly Define and Embrace Service-learning.*** Once the institution has established a definition of SL, embrace the opportunity to challenge the traditional pedagogical approach. Do not be afraid to integrate SL into your curriculum. Faculty can find SL opportunities through networking and being aware of what community services are available. Teaching can extend beyond the classroom thus expanding the students' learning opportunities from a conventional didactic delivery to more of a holistic, global approach. Service-learning activities offer students an opportunity to engage in the cultural, social, and economics of the real world, while at the same time, instilling an appreciation and the necessary preparation for entry into the workplace. Service-learning is one tool that can be effectively implemented to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

**Recommendation #2. *Develop a Strategy for Implementing Service-learning within your College Classroom or Program.*** Include a clear description of the service component in the course syllabi, along with a rationale of short and long-term benefits. Consider including a reflection piece for students to actively engage in self-reflection and critical appraisal of the experience. To aid in this discovery, it is recommended to consider using a SL framework, such as the LEARN faculty-friendly framework, to assist with the implementation of such valuable learning experiences in which students engage in community and or civic projects to enhance critical thinking, reflection, as well as a sense of personal responsibility. In line with Boyer's Model of Scholarship (1990), embracing the scholarship of discovery, integration, application and teaching to provide students with a rich learning experience may better prepare the future generation.

**Recommendation #3. *Consider Adapting Rather than Adopting This Service-learning Framework to Best Fit Your Teaching and Learning Needs.*** While universities share much in common with respect to their missions and goals, they do differ in various ways with respect to how they operationalize and organize instruction across departments and colleges, whether they have special programs in place to support collaboration with area schools and communities, how they deliver courses, programs, and other student and faculty support services. Therefore, the authors recommend that faculty adapt the LEARN model when infusing SL projects within college classrooms and programs. The sample service-learning projects outlined in Table 1 provide basic guidelines for infusing service-learning projects across courses and programs. The faculty-friendly framework can easily be adapted to any course to develop or institute a holistic approach to SL where students can LEARN, or learn, engage, appreciate, reflect, and network.

**Recommendation #4. *Consult Available Service-learning Resources When Infusing Service-Learning Projects Across Courses and Programs.*** A rich array of excellent resources and materials exist to assist faculty in initiating service-learning projects across their courses and programs. The authors suggest that faculty start with the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, which provides an array of policy, research, and best practices relative to SL. As well, a number of universities have excellent

service-learning offices, where faculty can find additional resources regarding service and civic engagement on college campuses. These resources will set the stage for a successful beginning when developing SL projects.

#### Conclusion

SL is a promising educational pedagogy in higher education. It is increasingly being adopted into higher education programs, and a faculty-friendly approach to SL may be a useful tool for faculty members considering the introduction of this pedagogical strategy into their curriculum. Through exploring the literature and completing a Logic Model, the LEARN Model was developed, a case study provided based on an online business course, and four recommendations were offered. Faculty members are encouraged to explore the LEARN Model and consult available resources as they turn to SL for educating their students in an engaged manner for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### References

- Boyer, E. L. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. Princeton, N.J.: Carnegie.
- Brail, S. (2016). Quantifying the values of service learning: A comparison of grade achievement between service-learning and non-service-learning students. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 28(2), 148-157.
- Cone, D., & Harris, S. (1996). Service-learning practice: A theoretical framework. *Michigan Journal of Community Service-learning*, 3(1), 31-43.
- Deck, S., Conner, L., & Cambron, S. (2017). Students' perceptions of service-learning in an advanced research course. *Advances in Social Work*, 18, 456. doi: 10.18060/21548
- Flinders, B. (2013). Service-learning pedagogy: Benefits of a learning community approach. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning*, 10(3), 159-164.
- Fountain, R. P., Toone, A. R., & Deal, B. J. (2016). Nurse educator perceptions of faith-based organizations for service-learning. *Journal of Christian Nursing*, 33(2), 102-107.
- Hart, S. D. (2018). Engaging students through service-learning in a professional nursing course. *Journal of Service-Learning in Higher Education*, 7(1). Retrieved from <http://journals.sfu.ca/jslhe/index.php/jslhe/article/view/135>
- Holmlund, M., Kowalkowski, C., & Biggemann, S. (2016). Organizational behavior in innovation, marketing, and purchasing in business service contexts - an agenda for academic inquiry. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(7), 2457-2462. doi: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.02.014

Jens, J. (2009). Teaching about the environmental through service-learning activities: Logic Model. *Division of Cooperative Extension of the University of Wisconsin Extension*. Retrieved from <https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/programdevelopment/files/2016/03/LogicmodelEnvironmentalactivitiesJJens.pdf>

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Lee, J. J., Blackwell, S. B., Drake, J. J., & Moran, K. K. (2014). Taking a leap of faith: Redefining teaching and learning in higher education through project-based learning. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-Based Learning*, 8(2), 1-17. doi: 10.7771/1541-5015.1426.

Loes, C., & Pascarella, E. (2017). Collaborative learning and critical thinking: Testing the link. *Journal of Higher Education*, 88, 726-753.

Lowery, D., May, D. L., Duchane, K. A., Coulter-Kern, R., De'Bryant, Morris, P. V., Pomery, J. G., & Bellner, M. (Spring 2006). A logic model of service-learning: Tensions and issues for further consideration. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 47-60. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ843842.pdf>

McWhorter, R. R., Delello, J. A., & Roberts, P. B. (2016). Giving back: Exploring service-learning in an online learning environment. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning*, 14(2). Retrieved from <http://www.ncolr.org/jiol/issues/pdf/14.2.3.pdf>

Mokhtari, K., Neel, N., Kaiser, K., & Le, H. H. (2015). Assessing the promise of a supplemental reading intervention program for at-risk first grade students in a public school setting. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 7(3), 281-300.

National Service-learning Clearinghouse. (2016). *Find resources*. Retrieved from <https://community-wealth.org/content/national-service-learning-clearinghouse>

Sabo, S., de Zapien, J., Teufel-Shone, N., Rosales, C., Bergsma, L., & Taren, D. (2015). Service learning: A vehicle for building health equity and eliminating health disparities. *American Journal of Public Health*, 105(1), S38-S43. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2014.302364

Schillings, K., & Fox, J. (n.d.). *4-H Citizenship Logic Model-service*. Retrieved from <https://extension.purdue.edu/hub/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/CITIZENSHIP-Service.pdf>

Seifer, S. D., Connors, K. (2007). *Faculty toolkit for service-learning in higher education*. Scotts Valley, CA: National Service-Learning Clearinghouse.

Sivalingam, P., & Yunus, M. M. (2017). Nurturing 21<sup>st</sup> century skills through service learning: From isolation to connection. *PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Science*, 3(1), 346-356. doi: 10.20319/pijss.2017.31.346356

Snell, R. S., Chan, M. Y. L., Ma, C. H. K. & Chan, C. K. M. (2015). Developing civic-mindedness in undergraduate business students through service-learning projects for civic engagement and service leadership practices for civic improvement. *Asian Journal of Business Ethics*, 4(1), 73-99. doi: 10.1007/s13520-015-0044-0

The Rural School and Community Trust. (2004). *Learning with a purpose: A logic model*. Retrieved from

[http://www.ruraledu.org/user\\_uploads/file/LPP\\_LOGIC\\_MODEL.pdf](http://www.ruraledu.org/user_uploads/file/LPP_LOGIC_MODEL.pdf)

Watson, B., & Reiersen, F. (2017). Best practice in international service learning (ISL): Aspects of risk and impact. *TEACH Journal of Christian Education*, 11(1), 29-36.

#### About the Authors

Dr. Belinda Deal is an associate professor of nursing at The University of Texas at Tyler. She is board certified as a certified nurse educator. She is the director of the BSN program at UT Tyler.

Dr. Melinda Hermanns is an associate professor of nursing at The University of Texas at Tyler. She is a board certified psychiatric mental-health nurse and a certified nurse educator. She is a Fellow in the National League for Nursing Academy of Nursing Education, and serves as the director of the MSN program at UT Tyler.

Dr. Colleen Marzilli is an associate professor of nursing at The University of Texas at Tyler. She is board certified as a medical-surgical nurse, case manager, advanced public health nurse, nursing education, and as an advanced nurse executive. She is the coordinator of the concurrent ADN/BSN program at UT Tyler. Contact Dr. Marzilli at [cmarzilli@uttyler.edu](mailto:cmarzilli@uttyler.edu)

Dr. Rebecca Fountain is a clinical documentation specialist at UT Health East Texas.

Dr. Kouider Mokhtari is the Anderson-Vukelja-Wright Endowed Professor, and Director of the K-16 Literacy Center at The University of Texas at Tyler.

Dr. Rochell R McWhorter is an associate professor of human resources development at The University of Texas at Tyler.