

California State University, Northridge
Policy on Service Learning

APPROVED by Educational Policies Committee of the Faculty Senate
February 28, 2001

Background

Governor Gray Davis recently allocated \$2.2 million to the California State University system to support the expansion of service learning on CSU campuses. Repetition of this funding is expected for the next three years. Service learning is a pedagogy that combines explicit academic learning objectives, preparation, and analysis with meaningful activities in the community. This academic year, CSUN has been given \$105,000 to support the development of new service-learning courses and infrastructure. As funds are distributed to faculty, students, departments and administrative offices for the performance of specific tasks under these allocations and others, a clear definition of service learning is of paramount importance. The Faculty Advisory Committee to the Center for Community-Service Learning, comprised of representatives from all eight Colleges, Student Affairs, Associated Students and the community, wrote the following proposal which was approved by EPC in February.

I. Criteria for Community-Service Learning (CS) Designation in the University Catalogue and Schedule of Classes

PREAMBLE

California State University, Northridge (CSUN) recognizes its privilege and responsibility to be responsive to the needs of its community through meaningful and productive university-community connections. CSUN's academic and co-curricular programs should reflect and address the economic, social and cultural needs of its unique region. Throughout the campus, programs along a Continuum of Service provide a range of opportunities for students to perform meaningful community activities. These include:

- volunteerism;
- Federal work/study jobs;
- paid or unpaid internships
- paid participation in service-projects funded by public or private organization; and
- community service-learning classes.

All of these activities involve partnerships with community-based organizations in which service and resources are provided for the benefit of under-served communities in need. In addition, these programs foster social responsibility and a life-long commitment to civic engagement in our students.

In the academic arena, research demonstrates that community-service learning is one of the most effective means of enhancing student learning. Community-service learning is a pedagogy that integrates explicit academic learning objectives, preparation and reflection with meaningful work in the community. It focuses on learning through assignments that involve the application of theory to practice and result in improved student learning outcomes including enhanced understanding of course content, critical thinking skills, retention, sensitivity to diversity and the ability to apply academic concepts. The community service may be direct service to people in need, community outreach and education and/or policy analysis.

While all programs along the Continuum of Service benefit local communities, community-service learning differs from the others in its equal emphasis on academic preparation, civic engagement and professional preparation through structured reflection and assessment of student learning outcomes. Students, faculty and administrators must have a clear

understanding of the definition and standards of a service learning course to facilitate enrollment, planning, staffing, budgeting and accountability. Therefore, to be designated as a Community-Service Learning course (CS), in the catalogue and for administrative purposes, the following criteria listed below must be met.

CRITERIA

Courses receiving the CS designation require the following elements:

- Integrate course theory/concepts with service in the community that directly addresses community needs (i.e. a situation where theory/concepts can be tested in practice, or a situation where community needs demand innovative solutions).
- The course is academically rigorous, as determined by Department and College curriculum committees, and appropriate for the students' academic preparation and course content.
- Students are evaluated according to their ability to integrate course material and the community service experience, not just for completing the course and its service component.
- The course is arranged in partnership with an approved community-based organization.
- The experience provides the community partner(s) with useful service (i.e. tutoring, enrichment lessons, health education, research, report writing) as distinct from mere observation.
- The community service component fulfills at least 15%, but not more than 30%, of the student's requirements for the course. In a three-unit course, this translates to a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 40 hours (rounded off and based on a formula that states each in-class hour may be complemented by two additional out-of-class hours of academically related work). Preparation time may be included in the calculations, with justification.
- Participation in the service component is mandatory. In those rare instances when a student can not meet this obligation, (i.e. disability, medical emergency or unanticipated work commitments) that student will be given an appropriate assignment that supports the service activities of fellow students, such as preparing materials for community use.
- A reflective component which ensures that students analyze their community service experiences and can synthesize them with their academic studies.
- The coursework is assessed by students, faculty, community-based organization liaisons or supervisors and the Center for Community-Service Learning.
- The partnership does not represent a conflict of interest to the faculty or students participating in the service experience.
- It is recommended that readings for the course include materials that provide an introduction to the San Fernando Valley community, to community service and to nonprofit organizations.

II. Policy for Approval of a Service-Learning Course

Departments seeking a community-service learning (CS) designation for courses will follow the normal policies and procedures for creating/modifying curriculum. A justification will address the criteria set forth above. In addition, when appropriate, a further statement will provide a rationale for including preparation as part of the allocated community service time. This may

occur, for example, when the application of theoretical principles may require extensive time to develop/assemble material that will eventually be utilized at the community site.

If multiple sections of the same course are offered, those with service-learning components will be identified with footnotes in the schedule of classes.

III. Policy for Monitoring a Community-Service Learning Course

EPC will conduct a review of all service-learning classes once every five years to determine their continued viability by reviewing University-wide assessment reports provided by the campus Center for Community-Service Learning and other appropriate data.