

# The General Process of Organizing and Implementing Extracurricular Service Learning in American Colleges and Universities

CHEN Zhizhong<sup>[a],\*</sup>; HU Haiqing<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>Lecturer, School of Education, Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang, China.

<sup>[b]</sup>Associate professor, School of Education, Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang, China.

\*Corresponding author.

**Supported by** the National Education Science Plan “Thirteenth Five-Year Plan” 2016 National General Project “The Growth Law of Entrepreneurship Talents of Chinese College Students and Its Enlightenment on Entrepreneurship Education” (Project Approval No: BIA20160111); Project of “2011 Collaborative Innovation Center” of Teacher Quality Monitoring, Evaluation and Service in Jiangxi Province (JXJSZLB13).

Received 9 June 2020; accepted 7 August 2020  
Published online 26 September 2020

## Abstract

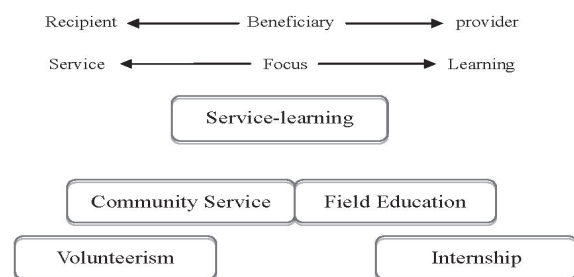
In this paper, I focus on the general process of organizing and implementing extracurricular service learning in American colleges and universities in detail as follows: choose the achievable learning outcomes; consider what service experiences are most likely to enable participants to achieve the desired outcomes; choose the achievable learning outcomes; approach potential community partners; design the experience in detail; determine how you will prepare students for the experience; choose activities that are appropriate and meaningful for the participants; Integrate critical reflection throughout the experience; address logistical issues; develop a plan to measure achievement of students and community outcomes; seek closure, recognize and celebrate success. Clarifying the process of organizing and implementing extracurricular service learning in American higher education has certain reference significance for the operation of social practice in Chinese higher education.

**Key words:** American higher education; Extracurricular service learning; The process of organizing and implementing

Chen, Z. Z., & Hu, H. Q. (2020). The General Process of Organizing and Implementing Extracurricular Service Learning in American Colleges and Universities. *Higher Education of Social Science*, 19(1), 21-24.

Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/hess/article/view/11789> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/11789>

Although there are multiple definitions of service learning in use today, the definition that I prefer, however, offers a broader umbrella that intentionally includes experiences facilitated by students affairs professionals, campus ministers, community partners, and student leaders, as long as those experiences incorporate the fundamental elements of service learning, reflection, and reciprocity. I find it helpful to use Andrew Furco’s often-cited model to highlight the uniqueness of service learning and how it is distinct from other forms of community-based work and experiential learning. Furco characterizes each program type by its intended benefit and its degree of focus on learning and service.

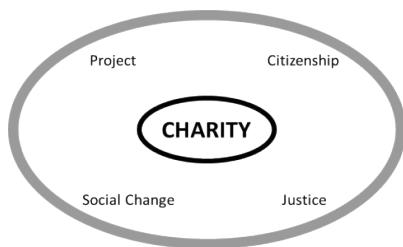


**Figure 1**  
**Distinctions Among Service Programs (Furco, 1996, p.3)**

Considering the polysemy and inclusiveness of the concept of service learning, I defines service learning as: service learning is a philosophy and teaching method that attaches equal importance to the relationship between service and learning, combines students’ learning with community service, promotes teachers, students and community partners to participate in the construction of knowledge through planned community service activities and structured reflection process While constantly meeting the needs of the community, we should cultivate students’ sense of social responsibility and promote their all-

round development. The meaning of community here can be school, community and society, even country or global. At the same time, considering that the concept of service learning includes curricular service learning and extracurricular service learning, the full text uses service learning instead of service-learning (Chen, 2019, pp.111-113). In this paper, I focus on the general process of organizing and implementing extracurricular service learning in detail.

Designing high-quality extracurricular service learning experience requires the same standards of care as curricular service learning. Extracurricular service learning must include the two key elements of reflection and reciprocity before it can be called service learning. The concept of service in service learning in the United States includes three metaphors of charity, project, and social change as following figure 2 (Kerins, 2010, p.90).



**Figure 2**  
**Charity at the Center of Service**

Service is generally understood as a term that includes a continuum from charity to social change. The conceptual framework of the design service learning project is shown in Figure 2. Extracurricular service learning usually adopts one of these three models. The specific steps for organizing and implementing of extracurricular service learning are as follows:

### **1. CHOOSE THE ACHIEVABLE LEARNING OUTCOMES**

As with any learning experience, it is important to carefully choose desired outcomes based on students' development levels and readiness for learning, the duration and intensity of the proposed experience, and the purposes of engaging students in service learning. It is important to use action verbs and concrete, measureable terms to state clearly what students should know or be able to do, as well as what new awareness they should expect to gain by participating in the experience.

### **2. CONSIDER WHAT SERVICE EXPERIENCES ARE MOST LIKELY TO ENABLE PARTICIPANTS TO ACHIEVE THE DESIRED OUTCOMES**

Before you contact a potential community partners, you need to consider what kinds of experience are

most effective in achieving the learning outcomes. Considerations include whether the service should be direct, indirect, or non-direct; what tasks are involved; How many community partners and service sites will be required; as well as how much service student will do and at what frequency and duration.

### **3. APPROACH POTENTIAL COMMUNITY PARTNERS**

Before contacting community organizations, it is worth investigating which organizations are most likely to be able to accommodate the time frame, schedule, the number of participants, their levels of experience, and your expected learning outcomes. You will need to be very clear about these elements, especially if your initiative involves large number, students inexperienced in service learning or when the service time is short. It is necessary to discuss in advance the definition of specific and measurable expected outcomes from the perspective of your community partners. It is also helpful to ask whether your potential partner is accustomed to working with students through service learning courses.

### **4. DESIGN THE EXPERIENCE IN DETAIL**

Extracurricular service learning requires comprehensive and detailed planning, especially when the experience is long-term or intensive, the service location is far from the school or the project organizer has no experience in service learning or project management. Individuals or teams spend time responsible for the detailed planning process of setting goals and action steps, arranging and taking responsibilities for each step and task, establishing a clear timetable, deciding what resources can be provided and needed, identifying potential obstacles and how to solve them, to establish a communication method, define success criteria, and evaluate the extent to which experience is successful and worthwhile for all participants.

### **5. DETERMINE HOW YOU WILL PREPARE STUDENTS FOR THE EXPERIENCE**

Students who participate fully in extracurricular service learning must deliberately embed the design of the experience. This may be more challenging than the curricular experience, which can also depend on the syllabus incorporated into the course, the usual class assembly, the tasks assigned by the teacher, and the grades given to the students. To help participants understand their expectations and deal with anxiety and fear, reflection before the experience begins (sometimes called pre-

reflection) is necessary. Preparations also include venues, target groups and communities, as well as detailed issues such as transportation, safety, specific tasks, decent dress code, behavior and necessary forms.

## 6. CHOOSE ACTIVITIES THAT ARE APPROPRIATE AND MEANINGFUL FOR THE PARTICIPANTS

It is very important for participants to design and implement the extracurricular service learning experience, and the participants believe that the expected results to be achieved are valuable. The organizer should not only interview the site, but also take part in the participants' activities. This is the best way to identify the challenges faced by students, and preparation, support, and reflection must be in place.

## 7. INTEGRATE CRITICAL REFLECTION THROUGHOUT THE EXPERIENCE

In addition to the reflection before service experience, critical reflection should be integrated throughout the experience, and participants should take part in a final, summative reflection. The issues to consider which are similar to those for curricular experiences, include when and where reflection will occur, who will facilitate it, whether it will be a group or individual, what mechanisms you will use, what prompts you will provide to encourage deep reflection, and how you will provide feedback. A frequently used framework for reflection in short-term extracurricular service-learning experiences is the What? So What? Now What? reflection model (as shown in Figure 3).

Stage 1: What is it? Reflection before service learning experience (analysis)

The descriptive Stage: includes identifying the service learning outcome, planning and preparation. This stage asks for a statement of facts and occurrence. Asking what? Starts the reflection process through descriptive questions for students to answer in their reflective journals.

What happened?

Did anything surprise you? If so, what?

What did you notice?

What was accomplished?

What skills and/ or knowledge did you bring to the project?

What social issues are being addressed?

Stage 2: So what? Reflection during the service learning experience (critical thinking)

The interpretative stage: So What? Questions led the reflection process into the realm of feelings, ideas, and interpretations of a community engagement experience.

So what? Questions launch students into thinking about the importance and meaning of their community engagement. These questions should also encourage students to consider impact on recipients and the greater community.

What did you learn?

What need does this community engagement address?

How is this type of community engagement important?

How is your community engagement connected to course material?

How is your community engagement experience connected to your personal and/or professional goals?

The stage 3: Now what? Reflection after service learning experience (Decision Making)

The action Stage 3 is the process of applying the lessons students have learned to other situations and contexts: new understanding about students self and community issues and new application of knowledge and how learning experience can be applied to other community engagements to produce positive results. Now What? Ask "Where do you go from here?"

Have you learned from any disappointments or successes from this experience?

How can you apply your learning from this experience?

Has the community engagement experience changed you? If so, how?

How has your understanding of the community changed as a result of your community engagement experience?

How can you educate others or raise awareness about this this group or social issue?

What would you like to learn more about, related to this project or social issue?

If you could do the project again, what would you do differently?

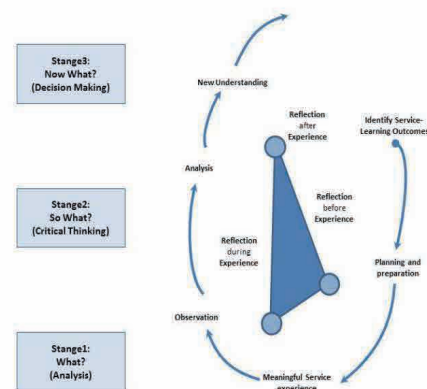


Figure 3  
Reflection cycle in service-learning

## 8. ADDRESS LOGISTICAL ISSUES

Even a one-time service learning experience has to deal with a series of logistical issues. This may include

obtaining any necessary approvals, obtaining resources, arranging tools and materials, identifying and training participants for specific tasks, responsibility and risk management, safety and security, transportation, and appropriate behavior on the community site. These tasks are very time-consuming, and the organizer should solve these problems in advance.

---

## 9. DEVELOP A PLAN TO MEASURE ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDENTS AND COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

---

If the evaluation and assessments are not included in the original plan, the organizer of extracurricular service learning experience can easily play no role in evaluation and assessments. From the perspective of the community, it is important to evaluate the degree to which the specific results have been achieved. For students, it is necessary to know the degree to which the expected effect is achieved so that this information can be used in future planning. In addition to the degree of learning effect achieved, the assessment may also include other effects, such as whether the participants will continue to participate in service learning in the future. It is also useful to evaluate the plan and process from the perspective of all participants. What is going well? What can be done better? What can be done differently next time? From a cost-benefit perspective, is experience worthwhile for community organizations?

---

## 10. SEEK CLOSURE, RECOGNIZE AND CELEBRATE SUCCESS

---

Unlike curricular service learning, the end of extracurricular experience lacks the conclusion to the last class, the end of the semester, the final essay, exams and grades. Well-designed final reflections can help students recognize what they have learned, what other problems need to be solved, and what further measures they can take. Even in a day's experience, the final reflection is necessary. Unless the facilitator helps the student to gain meaning from reflection, the reflection seems useless and irrelevant.

Recognizing and celebrating success is an important element of extracurricular service learning, which varies according to the level of participants. For example, it is appropriate to encourage and reward freshmen T-shirts that participate in a day's service before the official start of school as recognition of their experience. Organizations that set up extracurricular transcripts use it as a means to formally recognize service learning experiences. Recognize student leaders who have made significant contributions or provide funds to participate in service learning conferences through college or external awards.

---

## CONCLUSION

---

In a word, extracurricular service learning is similar to social practice in Chinese higher education; we can embed the three metaphors of charity, project, and social change into Chinese social practice, which make the social practice meaningful. Clarifying the process of organizing and implementing extracurricular service learning in American higher education has certain reference significance for the operation of social practice in Chinese higher education.

---

## REFERENCES

---

- Furco, A. (1996). Service-learning: A balanced approach to experiential education. In *Expanding Boundaries: Service and Learning* (p.3). Washington, DC: Corporation for National and Community Service.
- Chen Z. Z. (2019). The meanings and characteristics of service learning of American higher education. *Higher Education Forum*, (3), 111-113.
- Kerins, A. T. (2010). *An adventure in service-learning—Developing knowledge, values and responsibility* (p.90). UK: MPG Books Group.
- Chen, Z. Z. (2020). *Research on service learning of American colleges and universities*. Beijing: China Social Sciences Publishing House.
- Service-Learning in the Curriculum: A Resource for Higher Education Institutions [EB/OL].[http://www.che.ac.za/sites/default/files/publications/HEQC\\_Service-Learning\\_Curriculum\\_Jun2006\\_0.pdf](http://www.che.ac.za/sites/default/files/publications/HEQC_Service-Learning_Curriculum_Jun2006_0.pdf), 69.