



SERVICE-LEARNING BEST PRACTICES: INTEGRATING SERVICE-LEARNING INTO THE COURSE SYLLABUS

In order to be successful, students depend on the faculty member to set clear expectations and direct students through the concrete, specific ways that they should be connecting service and course content.

This document describes how S-L can be explicitly written into each component of the course syllabus—thus clarifying the S-L process and expectations for students and emphasizing the integration of service into your course. Examples are adapted from syllabi of Northeastern S-L faculty.

- For examples of full syllabi, see the faculty section of our website, www.neu.edu/servicelearning. For information on additional communication of service-learning expectations to students, see *Service-Learning Best Practices: Introducing and Preparing Students for Service-Learning*.

1. Instructor Information

- If you have a Service-Learning Teaching Assistant, list their contact information and office hours along with your own.

2. Course Description

- If possible, in the official course description used by the registrar, mention service-learning and its role in your course. This increases the likelihood that students will be aware of the use of S-L in the course before they enroll.
 - To alter your course description, see <http://www.northeastern.edu/registrar/crsnumfrms.html>.
- Even if changing the registrar's course description is not possible, you can still adapt the course description used in your syllabus to note the use of S-L in your course.

The following excerpts provide examples of sentences that can be added to existing course descriptions.

example:

...It further utilizes a service-learning project to help in the application of both theoretical understandings as well as the development of practical skills.ⁱ

example:

...Students will engage in service-learning, which will involve hands-on service in the field of child intervention that will link the coursework on research and theory to human services practice.ⁱⁱ

- You may also think about including a definition of service-learning on your syllabus since many students have either never heard of it or associate it with secondary school service-learning, which uses a very different model. S-L at Northeastern is: "a form of experiential learning involving partnerships between academic courses and community-based organizations. Students will engage in hands-on service roles and/or projects, through which you will learn about and apply course concepts while intentionally addressing the needs/interests identified by our community partners."

3. Course Goals and Objectives

- By incorporating service-learning into your goals and/or objectives, you establish the importance of S-L in the course and providing a justification for incorporating service-learning into the grading process.
- Articulate how service-learning will advance learning in the class as well as provide a mutually beneficial partnership with the community. Benefits of service-learning may be specific to your discipline/profession but are often based on the following general concepts:
 - *Possible learning outcomes:* ability to apply course concepts to real-world experience; experience working with clients in a professional setting; ability to work across differences of background, culture, and personality; knowledge of careers that relate to course content, based on interactions with staff at students' service sites.
 - *Possible community outcomes:* meeting of needs identified by the community; development of an enhanced sense of civic responsibility; understanding of the ethical aspects of the profession or field; contribution to Northeastern's long-term partnership with local communities.

In the following example, the course goals incorporate both the learning outcomes and the community outcomes of an S-L project.

example:

The goals of the course are:

- 1.) To understand the theory and best practices of sound nonprofit program management, fundraising, and philanthropy.
- 2.) To build practical skills in nonprofit program management by designing and implementing a project that is responsive to the needs of the service-learning (S-L) partner organization; and
- 3.) To develop skills in strategic philanthropy through the management of a donor advised fund.ⁱⁱⁱ

- Because S-L is intended to deepen academic learning, it should align with the course objectives already in use. S-L can be incorporated into course outcomes even when the phrase "service-learning" is not used.

The following example demonstrates how you can list service as a course method, rather than mentioning "service-learning" as its own, separate objective.

example:

Through case studies, service experiences, readings, discussions, and other class assignments, this course is designed to help you meet the following general objectives:

- To *understand* how deviance is defined and produced.
- To gain a *working knowledge* of the key sociological theories of deviance.
- To *apply* the conceptual tools of these theories.
- To *critically evaluate* institutional responses to deviance and control.^{iv}

4. Course Materials

- Service will be a key "text" in the course. Students should be prepared to pay for their own public transportation to and from their service placements, just as they pay for textbooks.

5. Instructional Methodology

- Students accustomed to thinking of learning as solely based on textbooks and lectures will benefit from a clear description of how service-learning functions as a teaching and learning tool. The following two examples alert students to the instructional methods associated with service-learning.

example:

Because this course integrates active learning through service-learning, participation is an essential component of this course. This does not simply mean attendance. You will be expected to contribute to class discussion through the application of course concepts to your service-learning experiences. In order to integrate a variety of perspectives and to encourage you to prepare for class, don't be surprised if I call on you even if your hand is not raised.^v

example:

Reflective assignments and exercises, including class discussions, blog entries, and the final research paper, will be utilized throughout the course to help students explicitly connect their service to the course content.

6. Policies and Expectations

- *Participation and attendance:* This includes participation in service for the entire semester, as well as participation in class discussions that draw upon students' service experiences.
 - In courses utilizing S-L, students commit to serve an average of 2-5 hours per week for the duration of the semester. These hours may include serving directly at a community organization (e.g. tutoring in an after-school program), preparing for serving (e.g. creating curriculum), or working on a service project while on campus (e.g. meeting with a project team to create marketing materials for an organization). Transportation is not included in these hours.
 - Emphasize a weekly commitment to service, rather than a total number of required hours. It is important for students to attend service continually, rather than trying to "earn all the hours" at the beginning of the semester and then stop their service or "fit all the hours" into the last weeks of the semester.
 - This commitment is crucial for a mutually beneficial partnership. Both learning benefits and community benefits of S-L will be reached only when students engage in service on a weekly basis for the duration of the semester.

The following example explains the expectations for a direct service commitment:

example:

Service Commitment: You will earn 10 points for each week you fulfill your service commitment. *If you miss one week*, and notify your site supervisor and S-LTA ahead of time, you will lose 5 points. You may earn back those points by making up that time within two weeks *if your community partner can accommodate this change*. Missing a second week, and notifying your site supervisor and S-LTA ahead of time, will cost you 10 points. You may earn back 5 points by making up that time within two weeks. The third absence at your field site will cost you 20 points and CANNOT be made up. Missing more than three service days may put you at risk for a failing grade.^{vi}

The following example explains the expectations for a project-based service commitment:

example:

Service-Learning Project and Presentation: This course will utilize Service-Learning (S-L), a form of experiential education which is integrated into your overall course curriculum. Students will work in groups of three (selected the second week of the semester) throughout the semester to collaborate on an S-L research project for Jumpstart, one of the nation's leading nonprofit organization in the field of early childhood education. Some homework assignments will relate directly to this project in order to help you continually build on it throughout the semester. One or two groups with the best final report and presentation (use of PowerPoint expected) will be invited to Jumpstart's national headquarters in Boston to present their findings. This project will also require you to participate in a pre- and post-service evaluation of your experience. This assignment is worth 15% of your final grade.^{vii}

- *Hours out of class:* Northeastern University policy states that students should expect to spend approximately three hours of out of class for every hour in class. The time spent on service should be included in these hours along with reading, writing, and all other assignments.

The following example clearly explains the time commitment associated with service:

example:

For any class, you should plan to spend approximately 3 hours outside of class for every hour of class time (i.e., ~9hr/wk). For this course, this will include a minimum of 2 hours of service per week plus blogging, assigned readings, reviewing/studying for tests, and researching and preparing your presentation.^{viii}

- *Academic honesty:* Do not assume that students understand how academic honesty policies apply to service-learning. Lying about participation in service should be treated as a form of academic dishonesty. Remind students that community partners will provide end-of-semester evaluations that include notes on student attendance and that their S-LTA will be in regular communication with community partners throughout the semester.
- *Communication:* Communication is key to the success of service-learning. If students need to miss service for legitimate reasons, they are expected to notify the community partner and the S-LTA or faculty member before the fact. Students should know that if there is a problem at the service site or any other issue with service, it is the student's responsibility to be proactive and notify the S-LTA and/or faculty member immediately so that the problem can be addressed.

7. Course Assignments and Grading Rubric

For more information, see *Service-Learning Best Practices: Creating a Service-Learning Grading Rubric* and *Service-Learning Best Practices: Addressing Challenges in Student Evaluation and Accountability*.

- Clarify what is expected of students and how they will be evaluated. Provide a grading rubric that sets clear guidelines and demonstrates the crucial role that service will play in course learning and evaluation.

example:

Course Grading: (100 points = 100%)		DUE
Attendance/Participation/Discussion	10 points	ongoing
S-L Reflections	30 points	9/30; 10/28; and 11/29
Problem identification outlines	10 points	9/23
Agency Review	15 points	10/14
Best Practices Guide	20 points	12/6
S-L Presentation	15 points	12/6 ^{ix}

- Remember that students are accustomed to being graded in traditional ways and will benefit from detailed explanations about the S-L grading process. As shown in the following example, it is important to spell out specific expectations and link them to grades.

example:

Class Participation	15%
Your class participation is based upon your performance in the following areas:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> participation in class discussion, role playing and other in-class activities; bringing examples of your service-learning experiences to class; the completion of other home-learning assignments.^x 	

8. Course Schedule

- Make sure to include service-learning paperwork deadlines, service start and end dates, service project deadlines (if applicable), and dates of major reflection exercises and assignments.
- For project-based or hybrid service, it is especially important to include check-ins and intermediate deadlines throughout the semester so that students do not fall behind on their projects. Your S-LTA can help you maintain these deadlines and check in with students. Establishing these systems ahead of time and writing them into your syllabus will allow you and your class to spend the semester focusing on the substance of service-learning, rather than getting caught up in issues of unclear deadlines. In addition, these systems will help ensure that students' projects reach a level of completion and quality that makes you proud to present them to your community partners.

In the following examples, course syllabi include specific service-learning activities and deadlines.

example:

<u>Week Six</u>	
Tues. 10/12	Mid-semester Exam
Fri. 10/15	Return Exam, Revisit Core Course Concepts & Service-Learning Analysis Lab #1 S-L Lab Worksheet #1 Due^{xi}

example:

<p><u>Week of Sept. 13th</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> S-L Community Partner Selection Form due Monday Overview of cell & DNA continued Synthetic biology Scientific integrity and bioethics S-L placements made; orientations/trainings set up <p><u>Week of Sept. 20th</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethics continued Diversity and evolution Debates: viruses and prokaryotes Preliminary research topics S-L placements finalized <p>QUIZ 1 WEDNESDAY</p> <p>SPECIAL CLASS MEETING THURSDAY (9/23) – S-L orientation meetings (check Blackboard for time and place for your group)^{xii}</p>
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- ⁱ Adapted from Elise Dallimore, syllabus for COMM 4534: Organizational Communication Training and Development, Fall 2010.
- ⁱⁱ Adapted from Emily Mann, syllabus for HUSV 3520: Child Intervention and Treatment, Fall 2010.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Adapted from Rebecca Riccio, syllabus for HUSV 3570: Strategic Philanthropy & Nonprofit Management, Spring 2010.
- ^{iv} Adapted from Vicki Schow, syllabus for SOC U285: Deviant Behavior & Social Control, Spring 2009.
- ^v Adapted from Vicki Schow, syllabus for SOC U285: Deviant Behavior & Social Control, Spring 2009, and Elise Dallimore, syllabus for COMM 4534: Organizational Communication Training and Development, Fall 2010.
- ^{vi} Adapted from Polly Attwood, syllabus for EDUC 4570: Inclusion, Equity, and Diversity, Fall 2010.
- ^{vii} Adapted from Vicki Schow, SOC U320: Statistical Analysis in Sociology, Fall 2009.
- ^{viii} Adapted from Gail Begley, syllabus for BIOL 2299: Inquiries in Cell & Molecular Biology, Fall 2010.
- ^{ix} Adapted from Emily Mann, syllabus for HUSV 3520: Child Intervention and Treatment, Fall 2010.
- ^x Adapted from Elise Dallimore, syllabus for COMM 3230: Interpersonal Communication, Fall 2010.
- ^{xi} Adapted from Elise Dallimore, syllabus for COMM 3230: Interpersonal Communication, Fall 2010.
- ^{xii} Adapted from Gail Begley, syllabus for BIOL 2299: Inquiries in Cell & Molecular Biology, Fall 2010.