Why Assess?
S-L evaluations have two primary objectives:

1. To allow us to track important data (including student-reported learning outcomes) for the University, for internal use in our program, and for potential funding and/or research opportunities.
2. To allow you, as S-L faculty, to assess the effectiveness of various aspects of S-L in your course, from community partnerships to the integration of service and learning in the course.

Although it can be easy for busy faculty to miss this important step, sitting down with evaluation responses to examine them closely and really think through their significance is essential for faculty who expect to see improvements in S-L in their courses. Simply gathering the data is not enough!

Through assessment, you can: track/document student-reported learning outcomes and note changes over multiple semesters; use feedback to help you improve your teaching; and better meet both student and community needs in future courses that you teach. The assessment process is also an opportunity for you to model the kind of reflective behavior that you encourage in your students.

Service-Learning Assessment Tools for Faculty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Tool</th>
<th>Collection of Data</th>
<th>Uses of Data</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Service Assessment</td>
<td>Faculty opt for their students to participate in weeks 1-2 of the semester</td>
<td>Assess students’ attitudes toward/ preparation for S-L and plan semester accordingly; compare to Final Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Student Evaluation</td>
<td>All S-L students participate at end of semester (distinct and separate from TRACE evaluations). *Includes elements that align with the experiential education evaluation systems coming through the Office of the Provost</td>
<td>Assess student learning/ attitude changes through the semester; collect feedback for future course improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Community Partner Evaluation</td>
<td>All S-L Community Partners participate at end of semester</td>
<td>Evaluate individual students’ performance in their service roles/projects; judge extent to which service met community-identified needs; collect feedback for partnership improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty assess their own use of S-L</td>
<td>Various methods; see below</td>
<td>Interpret student and CP evaluation responses; plan for next semester</td>
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</table>

The S-L Staff have seen patterns in evaluation data over the years. We can help you interpret feedback (whether it’s positive or negative) and use it constructively to take your course to the next level.

Your S-LTAs can also provide further perspective on the use of S-L in your course and on the meaning of evaluation responses. S-LTAs’ involvement in the day-to-day details of S-L and their understanding of students’ point of view can give them unique insight. In addition, although some parts of the S-LTA evaluation are confidential, we can share other parts with you as another way to hear S-LTAs’ perspectives.
If you take the time to read through students’ open-ended responses, you will likely find feedback that will help you improve your course as well as inspiring testimonies of students’ positive, transformative experiences with S-L. Even students’ less positive feedback can be extremely useful. However, student feedback often takes some decoding to discern the root causes behind the reactions.

Research suggests that not only do outcomes of S-L improve when service and learning are well-integrated—but without proper integration, there may be no positive outcomes at all for student learning through S-L.¹ Many challenges with S-L are, below the surface, the results of insufficient integration of service into the course.

The following examples of negative student feedback can be due to various causes, but all three often come back to the issue of thoroughly integrating service and classroom experiences.

1. “The assignment was pointless/didn’t make sense”: How can you more clearly explain the rationale behind an assignment to students? Partly because S-L works differently than typical lecture courses, students need you to be extremely explicit about the reasoning behind your teaching methods and assignments.

2. “Service took up too much time”: Service may have ended up demanding more of students’ time than you and your community partners had expected. Do service roles/placements need to be adjusted in order to keep the time commitment reasonable? Alternatively, do you need to adjust the balance of other assignments in your course in order to allow for students to commit meaningfully to their service? 
   However, this feedback may come up even if the time demands of service are reasonable: If students perceive service as an irrelevant add-on to the course rather than an integral part of the learning experience, it will seem to them like an extra time burden unrelated to their academics.

3. “My service didn’t relate to the course content”: Perhaps students’ service roles/projects need to be reconsidered in order to better align with course content.
   However, even when the connections between students’ service experiences and the course material seem obvious to you, students often need more well-guided, structured, and frequent opportunities for reflection in order to reach their aha! moments. How can you continually find opportunities to align discussions of service experiences with existing class discussions in ways that help students make service-learning connections? How can rigorous reflective assignments and activities better guide students to make these connections?

Student Evaluations: Limitations of Student Evaluation Data
- As self-reported data, the evaluations reflect the biases and motivations of the respondents.
- Look closely at the student evaluation response rate: not all students’ opinions may be expressed.
- There may always be a small number of students who will continue to resist S-L. As important as it is to pay attention to negative feedback, do not let a small number of complaints overshadow the positive responses.

Interpreting Community Partner (CP) Evaluations

Look for CP’s measures of the quality and value of students’ service as well as the extent to which service met the identified need of the community. However, keep in mind that if your CP is partnering with multiple courses this semester, their responses may apply to their S-L partnership overall, rather than specifically their experience with your course.

CPs also evaluate each individual students’ or project groups’ performance in service. The S-L staff will send you these responses in time for you to use the feedback to inform students’ final grades.

➢ For important notes about how CP evaluations should—and shouldn’t—be used, see Service-Learning Best Practices: Creating a Service-Learning Grading Rubric.

Compare CP and student perspectives on the partnership and service roles/projects. Are CP and student perspectives consistent or does one prompt you to reexamine the responses of the other? This degree of consistency can help you judge the effectiveness of communication in the partnership. Do you need to invest the same amount of time or more time next semester communicating with the CP to insure that expectations are clear on all sides? Do you need to add more structure to communication and check-ins between all parties throughout the semester?

➢ For more details on relations with CPs, see Service-Learning Best Practices: Community Partnerships.

“It seems to me that the coursework that is paired with [students’] service helps them become much more engaged than the average volunteer, and they were so beneficial in that sense.”

—Community Partner, Fall 2010

Self-Assessing as S-L Faculty

As informative as student and CP evaluations can be, your assessment process is not complete without your own examination of the use of S-L in your course.

Look over students’ assignments, blog entries, your notes from and memories of class discussions, and other documentation of students’ thinking and performance from throughout the semester.

• Over the course of the semester, what changes have students showed...
  ...in the depth of their thought and understanding of course material?
  ...in their engagement with and enthusiasm for the course material?
  ...in their oral and written communication skills?
  ...in their attitudes toward the community and civic responsibility?
  
  o Do these outcomes differ from your experience teaching courses without S-L?

• To what extent have students reached the desired learning outcomes of your course?
  
  o In what ways have service experiences, as integrated into the course, played a role in reaching each desired learning outcome? In what ways can service experiences be better integrated to play a more powerful role in helping students reach desired learning outcomes?
  
  o Did service experiences, as integrated into the course, promote valuable learning outcomes that you had not anticipated/had not articulated in your original course goals or objectives?