Integrating S-L into your existing course assignments—from research papers and exams to final presentations—is an ideal way to deepen students’ grasp of course content.

General Guidelines for S-L Course Assignments

To maximize learning, the connection between service and academics should be a two-way street. Assignments may either ask students to draw upon their service experiences when discussing or analyzing course concepts or to use course concepts to interpret service experiences.

- Connecting service and academic course content
  - Rather than assigning students separate “service-learning assignments” and “regular assignments,” think about ways that you can give students the opportunity to draw upon their service experiences throughout your course assignments. While BlackBoard posting or blogging about service is a powerful way to get students started, the integration of service and learning should not end there. (This is not to say that students must discuss service in all their assignments.)
  - Assignments should engage students at each level of the What? So What? Now What? cycle.

- Using examples from service experiences
  - Assignments that incorporate S-L should require students to use examples of situations that they experienced or observed during service. Students who have been consistently discussing, blogging, or otherwise reflecting on their service experiences will find it much easier to think of relevant examples once the time comes to write an essay, give a presentation, or complete an exam.
  - If no relevant anecdotes from service come to mind, students may use situations discussed by classmates or propose hypothetical situations that might occur at their service site or while working on service projects. However, make sure to clarify with students when they can use hypothetical situations and when they are bound by academic honesty to report truthfully about their service.

Ways to integrate S-L into course assignments include:

- Adding one or more questions (such as the questions listed on the next page) to existing essay prompts, written exams, or oral presentation assignments.
- Requiring or giving students the option of using their service experiences/observations or information from their community partners as a source in a research paper, just as external research sources would be used.
- Asking students to use the terminology or language of the field or discipline when discussing their service. This technique will help students continuously connect service and academic content.
“Students in service-learning placements are often able to make critical connections between the course readings, class discussions, politics, and the implementation of social and educational policies and programs....With the start of service, the classroom discussions shift, from a singular focus on readings and course material, to a layered and more critical assessment of best practices. Students quickly can identify the role of their community partner and can compare and contrast their experiences in the field with the texts and content of the course.” –Service-Learning Faculty Member Emily Mann, Fall 2010

Below are some of the types of questions you can use in assignments in order to spark students’ critical reflective thinking.

**How do service experiences and course content...**

- **Corroborate?**
  - Provide an example from your service that seems to illustrate a concept discussed in the course. Explain how your example aligns with the concept.
    - How does your knowledge of the concept help you understand what you experienced during your service?
    - What have you learned about the benefits of applying theory to real-world situations?

- **Challenge each other?**
  - Provide an example from your service that complicates or seems to provide evidence against a concept or theory discussed in the course. Explain how your real-world example challenges or conflicts with the concept.
    - How would a proponent of the concept respond to your challenge?
    - What have you learned about the difficulties of applying theory to real-world situations?

- **Compare?**
  - View an aspect or anecdote of your service experience through the lens of two or more theories or perspectives discussed in the course. How do these various lenses allow you to interpret your experience in different ways?
    - Have your service experiences changed your opinion about which theory or perspective you agree with?

- **Form the basis of Critiques?**
  - How could course concepts be applied to improve your personal performance in your service role/project? What have you learned about the areas in which you could use improvement?
  - How could course concepts be applied to improve the function of your community partner organization? In light of course concepts, what should stay the same, change, or be added to the organization’s programming or policies to help the organization better accomplish its mission?

- **Connect to Careers?**
  - What has your service taught you about the rewards or challenges of a career in this discipline?
  - In light of your service, how can/should professionals in this discipline contribute to the community?

⇒ For practical examples and inspiration, check out the collections of model syllabi, assignments and activities—shared by your fellow Northeastern S-L faculty members—in the faculty section of our website, www.neu.edu/servicelearning.

“Applying classroom learning in the real world is not a trivial task and it doesn’t accomplish itself. There is a gap between ‘knowing’ and ‘doing.’ For me, S-L provided that missing link.”

–Student Service-Learner, Spring 2010

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