One of the purposes of service-learning is to bring life and relevance to key course concepts. Unfortunately, many students do not immediately see the tie between the vivid, complex experiences of their service and the important ideas and concepts discussed in the classroom. Subtract reflection from the service-learning equation and you eliminate the learning component.

The reflection process elevates community service to a point where students can make cognitive connections to learning, create linkages to prior experiences and make new sense of the world. In addition, reflection guards students against inaccurate perceptions or biases and helps them clarify their own values as they confront new people and new situations.

In order to help students process and internalize what they are learning from their service involvement, reflection should be more than looking back and recounting experiences. By incorporating critical analysis of social issues or the context of service, reflection can help increase participants’ self-awareness, sense of empowerment to create change, and connection to others.

This guide is designed to help faculty effectively create and implement reflective activities and assignments that successfully link service experiences to academic study. The more detailed the plan for reflection, the better the learning outcome for the students involved.
WHAT IS REFLECTION?

Reflection is a means of helping students internalize their service experience and make connections between their service and their academic objectives by reviewing, analyzing and evaluating the experience. Reflection can be oral, written or expressed through activities.
Course Connection
Reflection should help students make a connection between their service experience and the academic concepts they have learned in the classroom.

Personal Connection
Reflection should help students make a connection between experience and their personal values, feelings, motives, desires, behaviors and ability to create change.

Social Connection
Reflection should help students make a connection between their service experience and important social issues. Reflection should also help students make a connection between their service experience and their relationship to others in campus, community and world societies.

THE FOUR C’S OF REFLECTION:

1) Continuous - Reflection is implemented throughout the course, not just at the end, but before, during and after.
2) Connected - Reflection activities are directly and intentionally connected to academic course goals and objectives.
3) Challenging - Reflection activities should create an opportunity for students to think critically about their experience.
4) Contextualized - Reflection is meaningful and addresses not just the course content but also the community.

Reflection can take any number of forms as long as students are required to organize and construct their own understanding of class content based on their community experiences. Questions that spur such reflection generally fall into three main categories:

1) Affective - What did you see and how do you feel about the experience?
2) Cognitive - How does this connect to the readings, the class, broader social issues or past experiences?
3) Behavioral - What will you do differently because of the experience?

**Affective**
- How did people respond to you as a volunteer?
- Did anything surprise you about your experience?

**Cognitive**
- How does the activity or its implications relate to a class reading?
- Did the experience contradict or reinforce class reading or lectures?
- What obstacles or dilemmas were encountered? How were they overcome?
- What are some of the causes of the situation?
- Where is this situation likely to occur in the future?
- Did past experiences prepare you for or contradict the experience?

**Behavioral**
- Is there anything you are doing or aren’t doing that affects the situation?
- What can you do with the knowledge you gained from the experience?
- What is service? What is the difference between service and volunteering?
- Has your definition of service changed? Why? How? Should everyone do service?
- Describe a problem the team has been having. What are some possible solutions?
- What have been the best and worst parts of this project?
- Describe a person you met on your project. What are their attitudes about the project? Where might those attitudes have come from?
- Have you ever felt hopelessness, despair, discouragement or burnout related to your service? How have you dealt with this? How can reflection help?
The following pages explain different reflection techniques.
1) Oral Reflection
2) Written Reflection
3) Group Reflection
One-On-One with the Instructor
Interview your students regarding their service experience and help them process the connections between their service experience and your course content. You may want to create a list of questions to use in the interview. Alternatives to an interview could be creating an open dialogue about their service experience or having the student share their feelings about the experience and then making comments that connect their experience to your course content.

Group Discussion
Group discussion can be either structured or unstructured. A structured discussion involves the instructor guiding the discussion by using specific questions. These questions may focus on how the service experience connected to the course objectives, readings, assignments or other academic content. This time may also be used to help students critically examine issues or concerns about their service experience and problem solve. Unstructured discussion allows the students to guide the discussion based on problems they faced during their service experience or to share experiences that need processing. Depending on the size of your class, group discussion can be with the entire class or broken down into smaller groups.

Student Presentation
Student presentations can be made by individuals or groups. Students can create presentations that convey what they have learned through their service experience. Presentation may be a video, slide show, informative or persuasive speech, poster, display, PowerPoint presentation, panel discussion or any other medium that will convey the students’ experience. Presentations allow the students to synthesize the information they have learned in class and apply it to their service experience. It is always a good idea to invite the community agency so they have an opportunity to see the complete cycle of a service-learning student.

Community Agency Discussion
Have a representative from the community agency who partnered with you come and engage your students in a discussion about your service experience. The representative can provide feedback to students, offer advice and counsel, and evaluate the students’ impact on the community agency. The student has the opportunity to provide the agency with a solid understanding of what has been learned and how service-learning can benefit their organization. You can provide a list of questions to help the representative and students in their discussion.
Research Paper
Encourage students to identify an experience that they had while at their service placement. Have students reflect and analyze the experience by researching possible solutions and using the course content to examine the experience.

Ethical Case Study
Ask students to write a case study based on an ethical dilemma they faced during their service experience. This case study could be used for future presentations, group discussions or research papers.

Journals
Explain the purpose of keeping a journal and clearly define expectations for entries. Students should follow a specific format that is explained and modeled in class. Have students complete journal entries as soon as possible after their service-learning experiences. This assures that their memories and perceptions are fresh and include the most detail.
THE FOLLOWING ARE A FEW JOURNALING SUGGESTIONS FROM THE NORTHWEST SERVICE ACADEMY:

QUESTIONS FOR JOURNAL ENTRIES

• What am I seeing?
• How am I reacting?
• What experience or beliefs have I had that prompt me to respond this way?
• What new ideas in the course are becoming more real for me as I consider what I am seeing and experiencing?
• What reactions, problems or questions do I need to let my professor know about?

JOURNAL ACTIVITIES

Clusters
Have people shout out words or phrases that describe the day. Ask each person to take two minutes to write five or six words in random spaces on their journaling page. Then, have students give a short speech about the interconnectedness of the words.

The Critical Incident
Divide students into their project groups and have each choose an incident that involved the entire team. Give them a couple of minutes to think about the incident. Then ask the groups to write a detailed, factual report of what happened, making sure to answer the five “W” questions: who, what, when, where, why. You can then have participants share their stories to see how they differ from another.

Dialogue
Ask participants to pay special attention to conversations they hear throughout the day, including light conversations between staff and volunteers, volunteers and sponsors or stakeholders, etc. Ask them to pay special attention to mannerisms, accents and the tone of the conversation.

Later have the participants pick a dialogue and duplicate as closely as possible how it went. This should be done in a light-hearted manner on a light-hearted day to avoid a “bashing session.” This is an exercise that gets better with time, as their observation retention skills improve.

Different Perspectives
Ask participants to recall a specific occurrence that involved some degree of conflict. Ask them to assume the viewpoint opposite that which they actually held during this conflict (or the viewpoint they were the least empathetic with) and write a description of the conflict from this perspective. This can include what happened, their role in it, what they want, or what they envision as the ideal solution.

Good debrief questions include, “How did it feel to do this writing?,” “How were you able to get in their shoes?”; “How was that difficult?”; “What is one thing you realized through this writing?”

The Fly on the Wall
Ask participants to take a couple moments to reflect on the day (where they’ve been, what they’ve done, who they’ve worked with, tools they’ve used). Then ask them to pretend they were a “fly on the wall,” observing but not participating in the scene, and write a short descriptive passage based on their observations.
GROUP REFLECTION

Not all groups or group members are comfortable or interested in speaking up in class to share their experiences and feelings. Being creative and using a variety of activities helps to gain interest and foster comfort and familiarity in the group. A mixture of activities can also address a range of learning and communication styles. Some activities break groups into smaller units, allowing participants to become comfortable speaking in a less intimidating environment.

Group activities thus offer a framework for reflection and encourage participants to begin thinking critically about their service experiences. Through exposure to a variety of viewpoints, participants develop a clearer, more in-depth understanding of the issues. Such activities also improve their ability to reflect without relying on structured exercises.
THE FOLLOWING ARE A FEW SUGGESTIONS OF GROUP ACTIVITIES THAT MIGHT SPUR REFLECTION:

CONCENTRIC CIRCLES
The group is divided in two, with half of the students forming a tight circle in the center of the room. The remaining people then pair up with someone in the circle. The facilitator poses a question for each pair to answer in a few minutes. Then, either the inner or outer circle is asked to rotate “x” spaces to the right or left. Another question is asked for the new pair to discuss. This activity can go on for as long as desired, giving people the chance to have one-on-one discussions with many different people in the group.

The following are examples of questions that the facilitator may ask in this activity:
- What social or environmental problem touches you most right now and why?
- What’s wrong with formal classroom education?
- What do today’s undergraduates want from their teachers?
- What do you like most about service-learning?
- What did you learn about ______? (Also see Frierian Fish Bowl).
- Talk about a time when someone really supported you.
- Who did you meet during your service that touched you deeply?
- Describe a high/low point in your service work.
- Discuss an underlying social issue(s) your service work addressed.

“GOTCHA”
The facilitator or participant starts to tell the story of the day. When the speaker omits a detail, someone else in the group says “gotcha” and continues. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers; rather it is a way to promote sharing of details and feelings, and to point out differences in experiences and interpretations.

STAND AND DECLARE
The facilitator makes a statement to the group to which members can strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree. Groups form around each of the four responses to the statement, showing the group’s “differences.” Members from each opinion group are asked to explain their stance, fleshing out the many facets of the issue. People must listen carefully, and can change positions if they change perspectives.

Questions are intentionally stated to allow for personal interpretation and to limit responses to one of the four categories. Several group members will want to take some sort of an intermediate stance, but should be encouraged to choose the stance about which they feel the strongest, or which is their instinctive response. Part of processing this activity can then be a discussion about how it felt to be so limited by categories.

BUILDING SOLUTIONS
In a small group, form a circle. Ask one member of the group to identify a problem that he/she feels needs action and resolution. The next member in the group is then to pose a solution through action.

Each subsequent member is then asked to build on this solution until the group feels it has reached a consensus on how the problem can be solved. This can be altered in a number of ways using the same process of group reflection and sharing. Consensus may or may not be a part of the process.

The facilitator can also pose questions such as, “If these solutions exist, why have they not been implemented?” “Would the people affected by this problem agree with these solutions?” “Who might not agree?” etc.

FRIERIAN FISH BOWL
Often, for many reasons, certain individuals will feel uncomfortable voicing their opinion in a group environment.

One mechanism for gaining full-group participation is to have all participants write their respective responses to issues on a piece of paper (do not include names). The issues, or pieces of paper, are then placed in a hat in the middle of a circle. For example, the facilitator asks that everyone explain (on paper), “Why are there so many homeless people in this city?” Answers may range from, “People do not want to work because they are lazy,” to “There exists a government conspiracy and homeless funding is often misused.” These are controversial but tend not to be voiced openly. Thus, the Frierian method gets all opinions down on paper.

Once opinions have been recorded on paper and placed in a hat, pass the hat among the group. Everyone must respond with their interpretation of the written response and then voice their personal reaction to the paper.

READINGS
Providing participants with readings about the issues they will be addressing can stimulate thinking and discussion.

Readings can include a mixture of viewpoints, including some that may be controversial or challenge participants to consider alternative ideas. Participants should be encouraged to connect the content of the readings to their service experiences, and to bring in other reading that they believe to be relevant. Such material includes relevant literature (philosophy, fiction and policies), newspaper articles, service provider pamphlets, poems and student reflection essays.
RECOMMENDED READINGS & RESOURCES


Campus Compact:  
www.compact.org


National Service-Learning Clearinghouse  
www.servicelearning.org


FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT THE VOLUNTEER & SERVICE-LEARNING CENTER AT (801)863-8786, VOLUNTEER@UVU.EDU OR VISIT US IN LC 205.