

## **The Development and Implementation of an Assessment Process for Service-Learning Experiences**

It is the purpose of this project to develop and implement an assessment tool that can be used with Service Learning experiences to measure the impact the experience has on the students in the areas inherent in the Jesuit mission for this University. The assessment will not only serve as a measurement device, but will drive the development of the activities, reflection and journaling critical to the assimilation and depth of the experience for the student.

In developing this tool, it is the intent to measure and define the impact of service learning so as to be able to support its development and encourage the strengthening of those components found to be most effective in their impact on the students. This project will also be useful in determining a process for developing the reflection questions and activities that will correlate to the outcomes to be measured in the assessment. This will all be done with the intent of designing it in a way that can be adapted by others offering service learning in other areas of academics.

Alice Smith, M.S. Ed.  
[alices@creighton.edu](mailto:alices@creighton.edu)  
280-3623  
Criss III - 463

## **The Development and Implementation of an Assessment Process for Service-Learning Experiences**

The purpose of this project is to develop an inventory that will assess the impact a service learning experience has on a student in regards to their growth in the dispositions inherent in the Jesuit mission. This will help meet departmental and University goals by providing a tool to assess the service learning work in their areas, encouraging them to continue their efforts, strengthening them in the areas of weakness as discovered through the use of this tool. Student learning will ultimately improve based on the changes made in this way. It will also improve because the effect of service learning will be supported based on information gathered through this tool, effective ways of teaching service learning will be accounted for, and other teachers will be able to make use of this information, offering credible experiences in this realm. That will increase and deepen student learning.

The first step in this project will be to articulate the outcomes we want to see from a service learning experience. These will be defined. We will then develop the questions in the assessment tool to accurately determine the status of the students in each of the outcome areas. This assessment will be used before and again after the experience in order to measure the impact of the experience. We will also need to develop a rubric for measuring the students' narrative responses to those parts of the assessments that require narrative.

The next step of the process will be to work backwards and develop the questions for the reflection and journal activities intended to foster this growth. These will need to be developed in such a way as to be a bridge between the experience and the articulation for the experience...but in a way that drives the student to delve deeper into themselves and become aware of the growth that is happening and the depth they are realizing. The questions, reflections and articulation become a critical part of the learning experience, serving to deepen and enrich the experience just in the process of the articulation of it.

This is expressed more concisely, (and was pointed out to me by Dr. Dickel,) in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, in a commentary by Robert Coles. In the article, Coles discussed the power of taking students off campus for experiences and then reconvening them on campus to discuss their experiences. It is not good enough to just provide them with experiences; according to Coles, they must have a competent facilitator "debrief" them after their experiences. I am hoping to do just that. I am aware of the critical-ness of this process in the assimilation of the experience into the students' lives. In the process of the reflection, articulation and sharing, I would hope to enable in the students the understanding, growth and application inherent in bringing the experience to its fullest potential for them.

The last step will be to implement this. We will use it for the first time on a service learning trip that is conducted in West Virginia. Students live in a community and tend to the needs of the poor of the area. The readings, activities and presentations during this time are aimed at developing the understanding, consciousness and compassion students feel toward the poor.

The time line for the project is as follows;

- Spring Semester 2008 – Develop the assessment, reflection questions and the rubric.
- Pre-session 2008 – conduct the Service Learning course in West Virginia, implementing the assessment.
- June 2008 – Return from West Virginia, collate the results and document them, with a conclusion and suggestions for further work in this regard.

The expected product of this project will be an assessment that can be used to measure the impact of service learning experiences, which in turn can drive the development of the reflection and articulation components for the experiences.

The project itself is sustainable since once the assessment is developed, there will not be the need to invest as much time in it. It will need to be adapted for each individual use, but the main framework would be in place. The particular service learning course it will initially be implemented will likely be offered in subsequent sessions, allowing for the use of the assessment in such a way as to provide data for a longitudinal study.

The budget for this project would allow research for the analysis of student learning outcome data. It would also allow the research into previous assessments to modify the teaching and activities and measure the effects of those activities. Upon completion of this research and project, new scholarship could be created. The amount requested would provide for the research as well as for stipends for the staff in West Virginia assisting in the development and implementation of the assessment and activities leading to it.

Staff in West Virginia – 5 @ \$200	\$1000
Support for research during Spring semester -	<u>\$200</u>
Total -	\$1200