

# Implementing and Evaluating Online Service Learning Projects

Marilyn M. Helms and Raina M. Rutti  
*Dalton State College, Dalton, Georgia, USA*

Aref Agahei Hervani and Joanne LaBonte  
*Chicago State University, Chicago, Illinois, USA*

Sy Sarkarat  
*West Virginia University, Parkersburg, West Virginia, USA*

As online learning proliferates, professors must adapt traditional projects for an asynchronous environment. Service learning is an effective teaching style fostering interactive learning through integration of classroom activities into communities. While prior studies have documented the appropriateness of service learning in online courses, strategies for implementing and evaluating service learning projects remain limited. The authors detail implementation techniques for including service learning and provide an outline for students and faculty, as well as rubrics for assessing teamwork and for scoring final projects. Results from an implementation in a professional development seminar are presented along with implications for students and communities.

**Keywords:** community service, online delivery, online service learning projects, teamwork, writing

Studies confirm students and faculty are increasingly turning to online education (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Hanna, Glowacki-Dudka, & Conceicao-Runlee, 2000), but learning activities and outcomes must be adapted for the new delivery environment, including active learning and assignments (Hathaway, 2013). Professors adapt the coursework to the online environment and must be conscious of communication, active and collaborative learning, and reflective practices (Gresh & Mrozowski, 2000). Research about online interactivity is increasing (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000) and Flottemesch (2000) suggested that students judge an online course on perceptions of the interactivity.

Muirhead (2005) agreed students and professors should be active participants in online discussions for this interactivity to be as effective as it is assumed to be. Faculty satisfaction in online teaching also includes levels of course interaction (Shea, Pickett, & Li, 2005). Northrup (2002)

suggested that five attributes including interaction with content, collaboration, conversation, intrapersonal interaction, and performance support enable professors to be both confident and competent online professors. Similarly Shaw, Chametzky, Burrus, and Walters (2013) found a link between positive experiences and instructional excellence, student learning, and retention in the online learning environment.

## E-Service: Adapting Service Learning for Online Environments

The design and implementation schedule is critical to the success of online or e-service projects and student learning. Service learning is the project-based practical application of knowledge and learning achieved by assigning students to work on community-based projects (Glenn, 2002; Loesch-Griffin, Petrides, & Pratt, 1995). Service learning projects are relevant to the environments where students will be working (Buckles, 1999) and provide short-term experiences (McCarthy, 1996) with participation in

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Correspondence should be addressed to Marilyn M. Helms, Dalton State College, School of Business, 650 College Drive, Dalton, GA 30720, USA. E-mail: mhelms@daltonstate.edu

community service experiences that have long-term outcomes and deeper learning (Grauerholz, 2001), exceeding that of internships and cooperative education experiences (Gibson, Govekar & Rishi, 2007). Service learning enhances students' sense of civic responsibilities and leadership (Waterman 1997), helps clarify values and vocational interests, increases social consciousness, improves appreciation of diversity, and increases confidence in students' capacities to contribute (Hauf, Long, & Sampson, 2011).

Fiebig (2014) agreed that service learning inclusion improves class participation and long-term benefits to students and develops a commitment to helping the community. Service learning can meet course goals of diversity and expanded reasoning. For example, Hervani, Helms, Rutti, Labonte, and Sankarat (in press) cited projects in which male students were assigned to a Girl Scouts program for a diversity exercise and management majors were assigned to organize the work flow of volunteers completing income tax returns in an accounting-based Voluntary Income Tax Assistance (VITA) project. Waldner, Hervani et al. agreed that online delivery strategies are necessary to ensure effective experiences. McGorry, and Widener (2012) found too few online students are engaged in service-learning projects, citing the scarcity of literature related to e-service learning. Odom-Bartel and Wright (2014) agreed service learning projects should be part of online courses to help fulfill the civic responsibility and moral character development portion of most college and university mission statements.

Waldner, McGorry, and Widener (2010), in their case studies of marketing management and public policy courses, found online service learning projects, where neither the students nor the community partners met face-to-face, achieved all the project criteria including product completion, client satisfaction, student satisfaction, interaction, and skill building of the traditional classroom. Strait and Sauer (2004) noted that in online courses, students are based in their own communities which may be in a different state or country, and the challenge to educators is providing a quality service learning experience to geographically diverse students.

For course design, best practices in e-service learning should be adapted from the traditional service learning literature (Waldner et al., 2012) and make explicit connections between the service learning project and course learning goals, reflection, appropriate time commitment, faculty commitment, student input, discussion of the project impact, and feedback loops (Imperial, Perry, & Katula, 2007). Caslie, Lane, and Heriot (2014) used service learning projects in an entrepreneurship course in an online environment using teams and found it enabled students to feel connected and help each other. Hervani et al. (in press) agreed online learning that mirrors face-to-face offerings and maintains course deliverables is important to both regional and program-level accrediting agencies.

Students learn through reflection, exploration, use of critical thinking, interacting with others, sharing information, and using resources (Nagia, Hodson-Carlton, & Ryan, 2004). Service learning projects can build a sense of connectedness and social presence in online courses (Barringer & McCroskey, 2000; LaRose & Whitten, 2000; Vrasidas & McIsaac, 1999). Building and managing a positive social dynamic can encourage knowledge construction in ways that extend learning opportunities in the online classroom (Longan, 2005; McAlister, 2000), but in an electronic classroom, opportunities to reinforce expectations and clarify miscommunications are challenging (Conaway, Easton, & Schmidt, 2005). Avoiding pitfalls requires careful planning and detailed structuring of every aspect of the online course in advance. In particular, the creation of more stimulating discussion questions and better professor monitoring of study groups help ensure equal online participation (Bangert, 2004).

The Internet has made it easier for faculty and students to share their work (Alderman & Fournier, 1998). Technology facilitates information exchange and enables virtually any class to transition into online service-based learning. Students apply their skills and training to solve a problem that could otherwise remain unsolved, and, in doing so, forge friendships and relationships that enrich their lives (Root, Callahan, & Sepanski 2002).

Here we use Burns's (1998) components of the service learning pedagogy (preparation, action, reflection, and evaluation) as the framework for implementing the online assignment. This study supports the implementation of service learning projects in online courses as a method to improve teaching, motivate student writing, promote teamwork, and create virtual collaborative presentations. This implementation and evaluation presentation is based on the authors' extensive experience in adapting service learning into distance learning, hybrid, and online courses as well as many years' experience with implementing service learning projects across disciplines, particularly in business and economics, as well as other professional schools. Results from an online service learning implementation in a professional development seminar are presented.

## IMPLEMENTING SERVICE LEARNING IN THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

### Introduction to the Service Learning Project

As shown in Table 1, adapting the service learning project for online course delivery requires the professor to carefully consider and allow time for the initial setup of the project. Regardless of the format of the online course, students are typically introduced to the project in the course syllabus and receive a project orientation, a description outlining expectations, and project due dates. As in the face-to-face

TABLE 1  
Adapting Service Learning From the Traditional to the Online Classroom

Service learning project components	Traditional classroom	Adaptations necessary for online learning environment
Class composition	More traditional age students living locally	More nontraditional students and often more international students living in many different locations.
Class format	Synchronous	Asynchronous
Class location	Students meet in at scheduled class times in one location and can communicate face to face	In the online environment students may not be on line at the same time. They will use various methods of communication such as email and messaging, and through voice-over-internet providers (e.g., Skype).
Project location	Local to the college/university	Local to one of the online students if working in groups.
Project introduction	Face to face and oral	Via course management software (e.g., Blackboard) and written. May need a video of the professor explaining the project (can tape in a prior face-to-face class).
Project ideas	This may vary depending on the layout. Professor may arrange for specific organizations that are willing to work with students. The project may also be developed by the students through a proposal system.	Project ideas will be developed by students for their local communities. Students will submit proposals for a project in their communities. Proposals will be evaluated by the teams and each team will pick the one they would like to go forward with.
Selection of project	For professor-arranged activities, students will choose the organizations they prefer to work with and students are assigned to groups. For student-developed projects, teams are assigned by the professor.	Teams should be assigned by the professor. Students will then assess the individual proposals of each team member and choose the online project they agree to pursue. The professor will assess their choice and provide any suggestions to meet course objectives.
Project validation/agency agreement	There is minimal need for this, particularly if organizations/projects were selected by the professor. With student-developed projects, the project must be submitted to the agency for approval.	Project proposals must be submitted to the agency for approval. Approval by the agency must be submitted to the professor for confirmation and validation.
Assignment work	In- and out-of-class team meeting all in person.	Via multimedia (Skype) and discussion boards or voice-thread as well as Google Docs, Google Talk, and email or conference calls.
Outline of project	Overview and goals of the project may be provided by the agency or developed by the students. Outline how goals will be met is submitted to the professor for approval.	Overview, goals, and outline on how goals will be met should be jointly created by the group and agency. Professor will approve. Then, approval by the agency will be submitted to the professor.
Resources	Students will be able to access resources on campus, such as librarians, software, video equipment, study rooms, and face-to-face access to professor, sometimes more than in class or during office hours.	Typically off-campus students have the same access for research, but not as easy access to librarians. Consider enrolling a librarian in the course, via the management software (Blackboard). Also provide links for tutorials and free software/applications for conducting research, completing coursework and creating video presentations. Students must access electronic equipment from their local library or use their own.
Presentation	Presentations will typically be done during class or for a specified showcase event for student projects at the end of the term. Professors should invite agencies and other stakeholders to assess the in-class oral presentation of the project.	Presentations will be taped and can be distributed to the agency, professor and other stakeholders for assessment, which can be done asynchronously.
Faculty and audience questions	Easy to ask questions before, during, and after the in-class oral presentation.	Can send questions electronically prior to the presentation for teams to answer or can post questions for teams to a discussion board following viewing of the presentation.
Student peer assessment	Students should assess the performance of their peers periodically during the semester. Group work assignments should be due at various points	With the asynchronous environment, it is important to create due dates for particular milestones in the project. For example after the project outline has been completed or after agency agreement. Peer evaluation

(Continued on next page)

TABLE 1  
Adapting Service Learning From the Traditional to the Online Classroom (*Continued*)

Service learning project components	Traditional classroom	Adaptations necessary for online learning environment
	in the semester and peer assessment should be made available at such times.	can be developed into an online survey so team members can provide feedback about their team to the professor. In turn, the professor should address any concerns a team might have about an individual with both the team members and the individual via a video conference chat.
Faculty assessment	The professor will assess the quality of the proposed project, the quality of the completed project, and determine if the team met the goals of the course and the goals of the proposed project.	A similar assessment process in assessing the quality of the proposed project, the quality of the completed project and goal completion.
Agency assessment	The agency will provide a review of the student progress and completion of the project. Agency representative are invited to attend and assess in-class presentations.	As mentioned the agency should be solicited for input on the quality and completion of the project. Additionally the agency should be given a copy of the presentation for evaluation and an online survey or rubric.
Assurance of learning	Business program accreditation (i.e., Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) and regional college and university accreditation (i.e., Council for Higher Education Accreditation, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) require faculty demonstrate student learning and also how course, major, and program goals are met. This is easily done in traditional classes and is based on grades on tests papers and presentations.	Similarly, assurance of learning is easily assessed in the online service learning project. Peer evaluations may be more important however, as faculty do not directly observe students as they do in the traditional classroom. Professors also do not know students as well, so final determination of learning may rely more heavily on rubrics and surveys.
Reflection and feedback	Class discussions can be facilitated periodically to gauge progress and assess learning. Sessions can also provide opportunities for students to reflect on course objectives and how those are being met through the project. Other options might be to have the students write reflection papers, or keep journals on progress.	Students use discussion boards to reflect on their learning from the project, how they incorporated course or program learning objectives in the project, and provide feedback on positives and negatives of the project process. These are posted to a cloud storage area (i.e., Dropbox) for grading. Additionally students can write papers for reflections or keep journals about the process. The professor should provide feedback to the student from the agency, peers, and the professor in a discussion board.
Grading	Because the professor often chooses the agency, knows the project, and the agencies' challenges, the final project is easier to grade and the professor will rely less on outside feedback.	Because online students often choose and contact their agency and develop their project directly, the information shared with students may not be consistent from project to project. Professors may need to rely more on team feedback and agency feedback when determining the final grade.

setting, preparation and its importance to any successful project should be stressed. Typically the online service learning project culminates in a final paper and a presentation either to the class (via video recording), to the community partners (also via video recording), or to both. Table 1 presents the adaptations necessary for implementing service learning projects in the online environment compared to the traditional face-to-face classroom.

### Potential Online Service Learning Projects

The online service learning projects can encompass various activities, depending on demographics, size of the economy, the locality, the college affiliations or community involvement, the student population and geographic

location, and the class size. The online service learning projects can be developed as an ongoing process over multiple terms as a continuation case and involve different classes or levels, allowing for the development of more advanced problem-solving skills.

Before beginning the class, the professor must identify necessary outlets for transferring classroom learning to agencies dealing with relevant issues that encompass course objectives. One approach is for the professor to establish contacts with community partners and discuss ways student teams can assist in alleviating their problems or to improve their situations. This can be challenging with students dispersed geographically, which may be the typical case in an online environment. An alternative approach is for the professor to rely on the students' own contacts. Rather than

providing a list of projects for students to complete, the professor can develop a list of criteria the project must meet, and require students to submit proposals of a project they would like to initiate with a detailed explanation of how the project meets the criteria and the requirements of the assignment. For example, within the service learning component of a business school's professional development seminar, requirements for the proposed project included (a) the proposed agency must be a nonprofit organization and (b) must meet at least one of the following: utilizes business skills, acts as a mentor to K–12 students, or networks with business professionals.

### Team Formation and Composition

Teams are often preferred for online service learning projects. There are two approaches to forming teams. In the first approach the professor assigns students to small groups (two to five members). Groups would then assess and rank the individual proposal of each team member to determine the one best project the group will complete. However, within the online environment, this may be more challenging as the professor determines how teams should be created. In the second approach, the professor preapproves project ideas and students then assess each approved proposal in a discussion board. Students rank their top three choices. The rankings are used by the professor in forming the teams along with students' interests, major, schedule, location/proximity, or other relevant demographic factors.

### Outline Preparation and Project Description

The next phase of the service learning project is the outline preparation. Students should present the problem statement and include a description of the area chosen for investigation. The expanded problem statement should describe the situation the organization or community is facing and consist of identifying information including name, location, population size, and the potential number of person(s) affected by the issue. Economic indicators (e.g., weak economy; high unemployment; no access to health care, books, fresh fruits and vegetables; need for information in other languages; poverty; crime) can be used to identify the issue or problem in the chosen community and document the source of the problem facing the community.

Students describe their project idea aimed at alleviating or resolving the identified problem(s) and explain the goal and purpose of the project and linkage to course content. Students should specify the methods or steps necessary to achieve the goals through research and describe how the objectives of the project can be achieved utilizing concepts and theories from their current class or prior classes in their major or related business disciplines.

Students should be reminded that the chosen assignment is designed to assist them in developing a quality project

that could potentially effect significant social change. Thus, the outline preparation is a first step prior to the action or project development phase. Preliminary questions, concerns, and comments are addressed in the outline. This part of the preparation phase serves to aid the groups in project achievement. Throughout the semester, students have an opportunity to integrate their learning of the project within online class discussion boards. They are challenged to critically reflect on their topic and proposed solution(s) in weekly or periodic discussion boards with feedback from the professor and other class members. The professor should provide electronic feedback to the online outline submission. In addition, part of the assignment can include feedback from other class members via separate discussion boards for each class project.

### Students' Action Plans

The student teams should create an action plan outlining the steps needed to investigate the chosen project, identifying the specific sources of data, types of data (i.e., quantitative, qualitative, time series, or cross sectional) and the level of data (i.e., country, state, or city). In addition, the charge to students is to divide the project by developing a task list and identifying group member assignment and milestones prior to the final due date period. Students are instructed that all team members must participate actively and equally in the project.

If a student in one location in the dispersed online learning environment selects a local agency to assist, online meeting technology (via Skype or GoToMeeting) can be used to facilitate project introductions and orientation. The online interactions, emails or conference calls (available on smart phones or Skype) can be utilized as online students in widespread geographic locations work together. An online library tutorial, preferably videotaped, is recommended to provide students with details for gathering secondary data. Instruction in software for creating videos of team presentations may also be needed. Allow enough time in the class schedule for class critique and voting on the projects.

In the action plan phase of the project, students explore their topic online via databases and search engines, by comparing other agencies and organizations, and if possible, by visiting, calling, and interviewing relevant institutions or groups currently addressing the problem. Taped interviews are shared electronically via discussion boards. In reflection,, students relate their projects to course material through directed writings, small group blogs and discussion boards, and other online communication channels. At the completion of the project students are asked to post their presentation online for the class, and initiate a discussion of their projects. Other students should add comments to the discussion thread about the projects and offer suggestions for improvement or modifications, thus providing opportunities for professors to observe and further guide the lessons learned from the

students' online service learning experience in subsequent lectures, postings, and online discussions.

### Reflection and Virtual Presentations

The reflection can extend learning beyond the online classroom. Service learning helps foster the development of a sense of caring for others. It is also a means by which colleges and universities can promote the civic engagement of students. The reflection process allows students to assess their achievements in the process of service learning and determine their contributions to the community and beyond. The final written team project is then edited and electronically presented for grading.

For the oral presentations, the virtual student teams should develop their presentations through video recording and presentation software. Popular software including free MovieMaker (Microsoft Corp., Redmond, WA) and low-cost Camtasia (TechSmith, Okemos, MI) can be used for preparing and merging individual parts of the oral presentation. Table 2 outlines the steps for implementing an online service learning project in the online environment.

### Evaluation of Online Service Learning Projects

Midterm and final team assessments of students' dependability, preparation, contributions, attitudes, cooperation, and communication should be used to ensure all team members are participating equally in the online project. The authors adapted a 5-point Likert-type team member evaluation document, with scores ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*), for the online learning environment. The last phase of the project is the evaluation by the professor following the initial assignment instructions and deliverables, including identification of contributions to the chosen nonprofit group or agency. The inclusion of other outside evaluators from business faculty and the community is also recommended in assessing the online service learning project and offers students more feedback and opportunities to interact and network with the larger professional community. This could also help with assurance of learning program assessment and accreditation goals.

The authors adapted a rubric from the traditional classroom environment to assess the online service learning project, addressing both the written and oral contributions. The written report, for example is assessed on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*unacceptable*) to 5 (*excellent*) on organization and structure, problem definition, use of decision making tools, linkage to course concepts and theories, evidence and justification for the solution, appropriateness of alternatives, and agency analysis. Oral presentations are assessed on use of presentation software, quality of visuals, organization of the presentation and transition between speakers, quality of the students' research project, handling of questions from the audience, and presentation time.

Professors can easily customize their own rubric and add categories to best fit the service learning paper or project assignment for their particular online class and course objectives by including assessment measures for demonstration of course concepts and theories can easily be added. Allowing the community service agency or partners to assess the project is easily accomplished using the same rubric or an online survey emailed by the professor. Students should use the final rubric to assess other teams' online projects.

This feedback from multiple sources allows an improved assessment of projects and can also speed the grading cycle in larger classes, particularly for senior-level or capstone course projects. This supports the suggestions of Munoz and Huser (2008) who recommend outcomes assessments and also support the participation of current and former college students (alumni) in the assessments. At the end of the online service learning project, professors should electronically provide student teams with their graded rubrics as well as a written summary of all the evaluations.

### Implementation Results From a Professional Development Seminar

To evaluate student satisfaction with the online service learning project, 174 students in a junior-level professional development seminar were polled in fall 2014 and spring 2015 about their experiences assisting some 20 local agencies and organizations. This class is designed to aid students in transitioning from the academic world to a professional business work environment. It will provide students with experience in applying for jobs, interviewing, networking, business etiquette, and personal financial management, as well as expose them to other relevant and timely topics for advancing in the business world. Business communications is a prerequisite for the course.

A major project of the course is to complete a service learning project working with area community agencies. Both sections of the class were taught online. At the end of the semester, students completed a short survey to identify the agency they assisted, and identify skills utilized from the class in the service learning project. Space was provided for open comments from the students about their experiences.

As shown in Table 3, students reported skills of public speaking, time management, negotiation, presentation, and network among other course content. Open-ended comments supported their satisfaction with the service learning project. For example, one student who volunteered to work with the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program reported, "I enjoyed working with others and interacting with different individuals, couples, and families." "Most people would not see this as a beneficial factor." "Working with people who have different cultures, belief, etc. is a learning experience."

TABLE 2  
Steps in Implementing Online Service Learning

Steps in service the learning process	Professor's role	Student's role
Preparation		
Select topic or project	Make course adaptations if this is the first time the project is offered in the online environment (see Table 1)	Read the service learning project description from the syllabus
Research	Identify local agencies or groups interested in collaborating with students and determine their needs	Follow instructions and utilize course web links or direct contact to learn about the organizations' mission and vision
Provide summary	Use the internet to search possible additional service-learning projects if needed	Select a team and a topic if one is not assigned
Outline preparation	Assign students the task of find agency partners if students are in geographically dispersed areas	Identify the specific sources of data, types of data (i.e., time series or cross sectional), and the level of data (i.e., country, state, or city)
Prepare preliminary draft—present the problem statement and a include description of the agency and project chosen for investigation	Utilize the university-based web resources to create links Provide web links and other sources for students on your course website for assistance Assist in assigning students to teams and to a service learning project Assign and then review the summary outline	Describe the service learning project idea aimed at alleviating/resolving the identified problem(s) and explain the goal and purpose of the project Write an initial summary abstract and outline describing the problem and possible solution(s) for the agency's need Review all rubrics provided to understand how your project will be assessed by classmates, the professor, and members of your agency partner
Action and analysis		
Project discussion	Work with students and review the project and supervise project development completion	Conduct additional internet and library research
Project development	Continue to edit the abstract, outline, and preliminary drafts of the paper and provide comments to student groups' discussion boards	Become familiar with the selected issues by calling or visiting the relevant institutions or agencies currently addressing the problem and tape and share interviews via course software
Project analysis	Answer all online questions as needed	Complete writing assigned parts of the report and edit teammate's writing and contributions
Reflection		
Presentation	Create discussion boards for students	Electronically submit edited abstracts
Application and discussion	Assess chat room posts and provide feedback Assign the class to comment on each project and suggest improvements via the grading rubric	Read other classmate's abstracts and post comments in the chat rooms and on discussion boards Make changes to your project and paper as needed or directed Continue to critique fellow classmates projects and papers and offer constructive online suggestions in a spirit of continuous improvement Post your final written paper to the professor Videotape your oral presentation and post to the class website
Evaluation		
Performance	Evaluate the project based on the guidelines and score using a rubric developed by the professor for the course. Post evaluations online	Share your videotape and paper with your agency
Contribution	Focus on the quality of the work analyzing the stated problem and developing solutions aimed at resolving the issues	Evaluate the taped presentations and provide feedback to other students on their adherence to the project guidelines. Create and use a rubric to score your team members' contributions and another rubric to score your classmates' projects
Evaluation	External community groups who will potentially benefit from the findings and other faculty members should also assess the projects as time permits to provide data for assurance of learning assessments via online rubric or survey Grade the final service learning project and presentation considering feedback from other class members and involved agency partners. Adjust student grades based on team member's performance and participation feedback, if applicable, as well as feedback from rubrics completed by peers, involved agencies, and organizations Consider publicity to highlight the students' online service learning projects—work with the college or university media relations department or link to the faculty or course webpage	Make changes to your project and paper as needed or directed Vote (anonymously) on the best project from the class via email to the professor or in a discussion board Provide any additional relevant materials and final project to the agency for posting to their website, dissemination to their stakeholders and for further review and use by the larger area community

Note. Adapted from Burns (1998).

TABLE 3  
Service Learning Results From an Online Professional Development Seminar

Students		Agencies and organizations assisted = 20	
Fall 2014	Number of students (N = 174)	Fall 2014 and spring 2015	Volunteers
Total enrolled	105	Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)	44
Gender		Alzheimer's association	32
Male	53	Junior achievement	27
Female	52	4-H	20
Age (years)		Area elementary schools	8
20–23	13	Girl Scouts	8
24–30	77	Voluntary action center	6
31+	15	Area churches	5
		Northwest Georgia Family Crisis Center	5
		Dalton State Teaching & Learning Conference	4
		Teen maze project	3
		Dalton Georgia Parks and Recreation	3
		Breast Cancer Awareness	2
		LEJO (Latinos for Education and Justice Organization)	1
		Consauga, Tennessee, drug court	1
		First-year experience	1
		Family frameworks	1
		GA Junior Rodeo Association	1
		Boys and Girls Club	1
		Creative Arts Guild	1

Student comments

- “I saw how great it was to lead a group to success. It was nice to recognize the people when a good job was done.”
- “This event showed me the importance of marketing, leadership, and organization. It showed me these are needed to run an effective event or organization.”
- “I was able to gain the entire class’ attention with information on business. Every student was curious and excited about learning and it felt good to help them learn more about business.”
- “From this experience, I learned a lot about people skills. I also learned to analyze tax returns in a real life setting. I really enjoyed donating my time for this service for people who really needed it.”
- “I learned how difficult it is to organize fellow students. Providing incentives helped. I gained event planning skills. I became aware of numerous platforms to promote an event.”
- “I learned that no matter how organized an event is there is always things that are out of my control. I also learned to get the attention of other, it is best to look them in the eye and be personable.”
- “There is a great need for better influences. With the culture trending into destructive norms, social media and home life affect teenagers tremendously.”
- “I learned the importance of networking and making lasting impressions/connections with people among the community. It is important to build trust in business relationships.”
- “I enjoyed getting to work with others and interact with the different individuals, couples, and families that came in. Most people wouldn’t see this as a beneficial factor, but getting to work with people who have different cultures, beliefs, etc. is a learning experience within itself.”
- “Something I took away from this is that people can come together to make a big difference in other people’s lives. Another thing is that events like this fundraiser are very good places for networking.”

In this class, the agencies all had structured projects and volunteer assignments for the students and most worked either individually or in small teams. While the exploratory results are limited to this one class over two semesters, the findings, particularly the anecdotal comments from students point to the unique learning experiences that supported class skills and content.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The benefits of the online service learning project are important to students, faculty, the college, and the greater

communities. Students benefit from applying textbook knowledge to solve actual problems. With declining funds for servicing target populations, civic and nonprofit organizations increasingly rely on college students and classes to assist in finding solutions to their many challenges. Colleges and universities are under pressure to prove their relevance and are measured for their community mission. The online service learning project is a key deliverable for inclusion on student resumes and to facilitate the subsequent job search process. Civic and nonprofit organizations benefit from free student consulting and often find and screen potential new employees from the student teams. Online service learning projects foster more college-to-



community relationship as well and extend the reach of the college with the geographic dispersion of the online student populations.

The mission of colleges and universities continues to expand, including more external stakeholders and constituents and the online service learning project has much synergy for all concerned. With continuous adaptations and improvements of the pedagogy to the online learning environment, the success of such projects will continue. Mechanisms for linking the community organizations with appropriate college courses and faculty will continue to develop as organizations learn of the benefit and ease of online student engagement.

### Areas for Future Research

Future research is needed in a number of key areas. The first is to explore how adaptations are made in the online learning classroom to incorporate service learning, with research on applications and case studies from a variety of business disciplines that explore the pedagogy, grading challenges, ways to implement using emerging technology and studies of student learning, satisfaction, and retention from online service learning participation.

Community agencies and organizations should be surveyed regarding the short- and long-term benefits of service learning projects and the success of online collaboration and delivery. Studies should assess the degree of community involvement by higher educational institutions and document how the level of integration in fostering the transfer of knowledge from students into local communities and economies and beyond has increased due to online service learning. There is also a need for research on the transfer of knowledge from the online classrooms into the various communities.

Other research should consider the online implementation process within the various business programs, majors, and curriculums and the evaluation of the benefit from these projects versus the time or opportunity costs and compare online service learning projects to other group projects, written assignments, and oral presentations. Teaching-based research should also offer how-to steps for new faculty who want to include online service learning in their classes, as well as further refine and expand rubrics for evaluating all phases of the online project and customize the rubrics by discipline. Targeted teaching articles should expand the list of online service learning topics for class possibilities by business major and level.

Future researchers should investigate the initial impact of online service learning project participation on potential career change to more helping professions or more active engagement in community projects, volunteering, and work with nonprofit organizations. In addition, future researchers should address if organizations benefit from partnering with college students in online service learning projects. Do

community organizations volunteer for further assistance from college classes over time, and is the assistance from online student groups equal to the assistance from student teams in the traditional classroom format?

Finally, case studies examining the longitudinal impact of online service learning for students are needed. Do students become more engaged, charitable, and philanthropic after assisting area organizations via online service learning? Are students more likely to volunteer their time and money to help the chosen organization or other organizations in the future after participating in online service learning? In short, there is a dearth of literature on service learning adapted to the online pedagogy.

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