A faculty learning community's reflection on implementing service-learning goals

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Implementing service-learning is challenging in light of issues such as changes in student demographics and pressure from existing curricula goals. However, closer community engagement is increasingly important in the long-term goals of our universities. Members of a faculty learning community at an open-access college reflect on the process of implementing the official university definition of service-learning in their English program. The implications of using service-learning as a teaching tool are critically discussed.

Keywords: service-learning, community engagement, experiential education, extra-curricular activities, transfer of learning

Participants are drawn into a faculty learning community (FLC) to work collaboratively on an area of professional development that affects the academic life of their college. Such communities are an effective source of support for instructors when they are exploring new teaching and learning techniques. Service-learning is an example of such a teaching tool. Researching the wider implications of such teaching experiences develops the work of the FLC into the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). Investigating inclusive teaching techniques is the primary goal of the faculty at an open-access college, where teaching is their primary responsibility. Open-access colleges accept all high school graduates or GED (Graduate Equivalency Diploma) students, who are usually members of communities in the area. Service-learning offers students from the community the opportunity of using their local knowledge in academic ways.

The priority given to service-learning is not just at our college, however, as this teaching tool has become increasingly important in the long term goals of the colleges throughout our large, state, Midwestern university. Discussions that emerge from SoTL communities are important because they report on the stages through which the institution is going to implement their goals. Shulman (2000) comments that "(a)ccrediting agencies are insisting on educational audits in which we provide evidence that we are achieving our stated goals" (p. 52). The work of the FLC described in this article began in fall 2007, when three faculty members received university funding to begin exploring the question of how to implement goals for service-learning in preparatory and college-level composition courses at their open-access college.

Our university is committed to fostering connections with the local community. The vision for future endeavors at the university includes community engagement, which is supported through an office for Community Engagement that supports faculty member's efforts to involve students in the community. Within the college, there is a commitment to developing more service-learning courses as a way to improve academic programs. Finally, at the

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department level, the English department incorporated the development of SL courses as one of its five-year goals. The FLC investigated how this could be done.

From the point of view of instructors who work in the English Program at this open-access college, implementing these goals is challenging from different perspectives. Initially, the group had to interpret and apply the official university definition of SL; the SL syllabi needed to be designed for changing student demographics; and the courses had to meet the University Composition Committee's established goals for composition, which did not include service-learning. Members of the FLC began teaching the syllabi in fall 2008.

I. The Group's Analysis of Service-Learning at the University Level.

The FLC began by focusing on the institutional SL mission statement that was developed with contributions from faculty throughout the university and representatives from all administrative levels, including the provost's office:

> Service-Learning (SL) is a specially designed learning experience in which students combine reflection with structured participation in community-based projects to achieve specified learning outcomes as part of an academic course and/or program requirement. By participating in academic community partnerships at the local, national or international level, students gain a richer mastery of course content, enhance their sense of civic responsibility, and ultimately develop a more integrated approach to understanding the relationship between theory, practice, ideas, values, and community.

Two related concepts in this mission statement were significant for the FLC. The first of these is that service-learning is inextricably linked to individual course goals. The second is that it is through this educational enrichment that students gain a deeper sense of "civic responsibility." Allison (2008) surveys the research on the collaborative advantages of SL for students, faculty, and community partners (p. 51), and she adopts Bringle and Hatcher's (1995) definition of SL as a way of organizing the conceptual base of her Public Relations Campaign course. Milolchak, (2006), uses the same definition when compiling her English Composition course:

> Service-Learning is a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of the disciplines, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (p. 51).

In both definitions, the SL experience involves students in communities, and they deepen their understanding of their studies by reflecting on these activities. However, a different emphasis is suggested by Bringle and Hatcher's description of SL as: "…an organized activity that meets identified community needs." The tone and positioning of this statement implies that the needs of the community are central, while our university definition places academics at the center; there is no reference to the "needs" of the community. In our approved university definition, through SL activities, students understand how community activities relate to academic and theoretical concepts. The "value" for the community is that through these activities, students are more aware of "civic responsibility."

Such differences are significant, and this tension is important in the debate on the role of SL in academia. Butin (2006) writes, "Higher education is torn between the notion of functioning as an academic enterprise concerned primarily with the rigorous, objective, and pure examination

of the truth versus as a training ground and incubator for the social and civic mission of a public democracy" (p. 58). The description of this tension in higher education suggests that academic rigor and civic awareness are separate goals and objectives. Service-learning is linked to the development of civic awareness; however, as Butin stresses, this does not help to establish the "academic legitimacy" of service-learning. In contrast, our university definition of service learning allows instructors to focus on designing courses that inextricably link academic priorities with civic awareness. This initial research on ways SL has been defined helped the FLC to establish a conceptual framework for the courses before researching the local college environment.

II. Applying Wider Curricular Goals to the Students.

Having established the wider curricular goals at the university level, the FLC began researching the literature that focused on students in service-learning. Although students at open-access and four year colleges come from different backgrounds, common factors influence the lives of all students and indicate changes in student demographics in higher education today. Butin (2006) comments that much service-learning literature presents an "ideal student who volunteers her time, has high cultural capital, is single, has no children, is un-indebted, is between the ages of 18 and 24, matriculates in four consecutive years" (p. 58). Current trends show, however, that students are increasingly working and studying part-time or returning to college while they also have family commitments, and this group is "the largest growing segment in higher education."

Therefore, like the majority of students in colleges today, our students would say that "they are too busy to fit community based learning into their crowded schedules" (Holland & Robinson, 2008, p. 20). The service-learning component is an essential component of the course goals, but such a commitment is time-consuming, and the FLC community wrestled with the question of how to justify the component in their courses. One of the themes of current research is that professors who aim to use service-learning in their courses must "accommodate" all the "multiple roles" in their students' lives (Reed & Marienau, 2008, p. 72). Students will understand the community engagement requirement when they experience this as an essential way to complete the course assignments. When they understand how "the service-learning component will enhance the learning experience" (Hendricks, 2007, p.17), they make time for community engagement. Students are increasingly aware of the sacrifices they are making when they return to college, and each hour represents significant value. For this reason, students need to know that they have contributed to the needs of their community (Reed & Marienau, 2008.)

Intuitively, the FLC concurred with this description of their students; and in the next stage, members worked though the process of relating this research to the university's mission statement.

III. Applying Current Student Demographics to Course Design.

Non-traditional students bring a range of experience that they can draw on as an important critical thinking tool in a class. If students are asked to use their background experiences to design individual service-learning projects, the critical thinking involved in these tasks "will likely make for a more meaningful and holistic…learning experience" (Largent & Horinek, 2008, p. 46). Kraemer (2005) has discussed the disadvantages of placing developmental writers in the position of writing "for" the community, and he suggests that writing "about" the

community "serves basic writers better" (p. 93). In order to do this effectively, basic writers need to participate in the community in ways that will help them to understand the needs of the members. Such participation offers the potential for truly engaged writing. College level students who are involved in communities have the opportunity of researching and writing about genuine community needs. Such experience fulfills "a wide range of learning outcomes" (Franco, 2007, p. 12). Franco lists as the first of these outcomes practical experience in "written and oral communication." Rhetorical analysis of writing for different audiences is very important at all levels of composition, and in service-learning courses, students have genuine experiences of writing for defined audiences and goals.

If the students' backgrounds are an important factor in the course, the academic goals of the class and the projects should be selected with the students' interests in mind. Students should be involved in choosing their community placements and deciding the ways in which they want to be involved. Individual input is important because experiential learning only takes place when the students are directly involved with the tasks where the learning is planned to take place (Fiddler & Marienau, 2008). Students' previous experiences should play a role because they "bring knowledge and skills (sometimes to the level of professional expertise) to a community-based project" (Reed & Marienau, 2008, p. 68). Drawing on and developing previous knowledge consolidates the growth of experiential learning. When they think meta-cognitively about how the service-learning experience relates to their studies, students are taking charge of their own learning.

For the same reasons, students can use their own judgment on the amount of time they spend working with the community. Research on ways that community engagement promotes learning has indicated that the length of time in the community should be determined by the amount of time it takes to "engender critical reflection on their assumptions" about the community and the activity in which they are engaged (Reed & Marienau, p. 68). The students themselves are in a position to make this decision. Thus, the actual time spent with the community could be a matter of hours, days, or weeks, which is important in light of student demographics at our college where 81 percent of the college's more than 5,000 students work, with 67 percent working more than 20 hours per week. There are differences of opinion about how much time students should spend on community engagement experiences, however, as lengthy time commitments to community partners in advance foster more stable relations. More contact with community partners gives more time for faculty to discuss course goals and work with the partners to forge links with the academic goals and the community activity. The role of the student as an active participant in the learning process is less active, however. Reed & Marienau suggest "educators may decide to emphasize development of students' self-efficacy over more time spent in the community" (p.71). These authors stress that the total number of hours that students spend fulfilling the requirements of a service-learning section of a course section should be the same as the hours needed for a class in the same course that does not require service-learning.

Service-learning experiences are an additional source of data that deepens the understanding of academic courses. The University Composition Committee at our college reviewed the syllabi for the service-learning sections, and the principal concern of the committee was that all the goals for first year composition were included in the service-learning options. Integrating the service-learning component with English Composition course requirements was another important consideration of the FLC.

IV. Implementing Service-Learning Theory in University-Approved Composition Courses.

The FLC worked together to design SL syllabi for a preparatory reading and writing course as well as two different syllabi for the research course in the college level composition sequence. The overall challenge the members faced involved integrating a service-learning component into the core composition goals of the individual courses. The students who comment on the courses in this section have signed the consent letter approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) giving their permission for their ideas to be used in this discussion.

A. *Service-Learning in Preparation for Composition.*

The primary goal of the preparatory course is to introduce students to the necessary developmental and process activities that help students become competent college-level readers and writers. The course described here integrates a reading course with a writing course where underprepared students are able to work on both their reading and writing abilities. Very few of the college's students are placed into this course. One important aspect of the course is to help students develop their reading abilities and to change their self-image as it relates to literacy. Many of the students have been told by teachers, parents, guidance counselors, and others that they are not college material. They have taken the university placement test and have been placed into one of the lower level English courses that do not fulfill their English requirements, so these students often have negative beliefs about their literacy abilities. Motivating these students to pursue the rigorous critical thinking activities promoted in the course is always an issue, and it is this same challenge the FLC faced when integrating course goals with the research on service-learning and current students needs.

The syllabus and service-learning activities developed for these students related to a common need that all the students share, which is active participation in their own reading. Many students in this preparatory reading and writing course are non-native speakers who need to read without pausing. The native English speakers in the class often exhibit lack of oral fluency, as well. Reading fluency is the ability to read smoothly and accurately so the reader is able to understand the ideas presented in the text. Marcaruso and Shankweiler (2010) suggest that "fluent reading frees up resources for higher level processing; thus we see a relationship between fluency measures and reading comprehension" (p. 466).

Reading aloud is associated with elementary school activities, and students are reluctant to engage in it at the college level. Because many students in this course need the opportunity to practice reading quickly with appropriate prosody and phrasing, students were asked to engage in a service-learning project. The project revolved around having the college students record themselves reading. These books and tapes were delivered to an inner-city classroom with its own struggling readers. This project was made possible because a colleague at another university was interested in finding older students to read with the struggling elementary school students. She felt the third-grade students needed more access to reading materials they could follow along with as they worked to improve their own reading skills. Together we bought third-grade level reading materials that college students could record.

Since this course incorporates both reading and writing, the other learning community members recommended linking the reading activity with the writing students needed to do. As Kraemer (2005) recommends, students in this course were asked to "write about the community" instead of "writing for the community." The first essay assignment asked students to reflect upon

their own experiences with learning to read and write and how those experiences helped shape how they viewed their literacy skills now. As students selected books to record, they were asked to think about their own reading materials they read when they were young. Students were encouraged to consider how these early reading experiences might have shaped their current reading abilities.

One recurrent FLC discussion focused on the use of a reflective journal as a place for students to begin thinking about their service experience and to begin making connections to course assignments. Students were given prompts to help them explore their experience of reading the texts. They were asked to reflect on how they prepared before recording themselves. For example, one student wrote, "one major social problem discovered (by reading to students) is the lack of communication." The third grade students were in an underperforming school that was slated to be closed. These third graders were reading well below their grade level, so the third grade teacher wanted ways to motivate her students to read more. The books on tape would be a good way for her students to increase their reading opportunities. The preparatory reading and writing course discussed why the elementary students were having difficulty reading at their grade level. Students explored the various social causes such as poverty, racism, uninvolved adults, and others that might apply to the third graders' situation. One issue students seized upon that is reflected in the quote is the lack of communication between the school and parents. The college students wanted parents and teachers to be more proactive in helping the third graders. Although we discussed these issues in class, very few students wrote about them in their journals. The journal assignment asked students to reflect on how the service-learning activity related to the course goals and to their own experiences with reading, but most journals focused on the mechanics of reading to the students and the frustration with the tape recording equipment.

Overall, however, the service-learning activities gave students the opportunity to reflect on their own literacy experiences, to begin to see themselves as literacy experts, and to explore social forces that influence literacy development. The recordings students made demonstrated that they could read fluently, which helped them begin to see themselves as capable of sharing their literacy expertise. They were also able to begin exploring the social forces that shaped not only the third grade children's experiences, but their own as well.

The community partner also reported that the service-learning activity helped her better serve her students. She believed the project effectively addressed a real community problem of helping struggling third graders by giving them greater access to books. By recording the books on tape, college students were able to engage with third grade students they would not otherwise be able to help. The college and elementary school are around seven miles apart, so many of the college students would not be able to meet individually with a third grade student. Another benefit to this approach is that students did not need a background check. These issues of accessibility and security were discussed frequently in the FLC. The discussions helped structure the final format for the service-learning assignment.

B. College-level Service-Learning Course: Issues of Social Relevance in Composition.

In college-level service-learning composition courses, situations off campus were a source of topics for writing assignments. The first of these courses focused on environmental issues, and students wrote three formal papers and a more informal reflective journal, which, in part,

documented the service during the quarter. To provide a socially relevant connection between service and classroom, the course focused on current environmental issues as a theme for readings, discussions, formal papers, journal writings, and service work. Students began the course with readings about and class discussions of environmental issues. During this time, they set up their individual self-selected service projects.

To do so, students followed one of two course options allowed for service work. Under the first option some served in work related to environmental issues and/or the environment for a self-selected and specific community group, business, or organization. These community entities did not in themselves necessarily have environmental issues or the environment as foci, but the service itself that students performed for the groups was required by course parameters to have either of these foci. Students who completed this course option sought out community groups such as churches, schools, and parks and served in a way to benefit both the group and the larger community while performing work tied to environmental issues and/or the environment. So, for example, under this first course option, one student majoring in education chose to go into a local elementary school class to work with young students on activities to increase their environmental awareness. Another student sought volunteer work in a local park, where she was asked to help keep the grounds free of litter.

Under the second course option for service, some students designed their own community service with the stipulation that a self-designed project must benefit the community and that it must involve at least one other person both to help in carrying out the service and to document a student's participation. One student decided to clean the trash outdoors at his apartment complex, and, in so doing, recycled all materials possible. Another student, an artist, collected candy wrappers and food containers and used them to make jewelry and art objects. She solicited friends to help her collect the materials, and, when the jewelry and art objects were completed, she gave them away.

Students wrote weekly journal reflections according to specific prompts on service work and on environmental issues. These reflections led up to and beyond the first essay assignment (reflections continued throughout the quarter); this first essay was an argument on a student-selected environmental issue. As part of this assignment, students conducted library research to find sources to support their ideas. The goals of the assignment were to find an environmental topic of personal interest, to think critically about an issue, and then to form a persuasive thesis supported with reasons and evidence.

A rhetorical analysis of a contemporary reading on an environmental issue comprised the second essay students wrote. This assignment required students to analyze the writer's strategy and then explain the significance of its elements. Students had to use and cite evidence from the reading to support their ideas. They practiced for writing this analysis through reading, discussion, and in-class deconstruction of other texts focused on environmental issues. Class discussion coordinated the work they were concurrently doing in their service work with the environmental issues that are the topics of the texts. The third assignment was an argumentative research paper on an environmental issue.

As students completed these assignments, they also recorded their thoughts in more informal form through their weekly journal entries. They used material from this journal as analysis for their formal papers; however, the journal provided a different means of writing practice, allowing students both to get their thoughts down on the page without attention to a particular academic essay style and to reflect on the nature of their service. The service-learning component provided them with the experience for this reflection while tying in to the

environmental themes of the course about which students were asked to think and to write in various ways. Through discussion with FLC members, the journal rubric was redesigned to include an assessment of the students' sense of social responsibility as described in their journal reflections.

One student summed up well in her journal how the service-learning component of the course affected her writing. She chose to work at a local prison, where she helped to pick up litter and recycle what she could. During the experience, she attempted to persuade reluctant community service workers of the importance of this work for the environment. In her journal reflection, she described increased confidence in writing essays on issues related to her community engagement because it "opened my eyes more about recycling and litter pick up." She went on to tie essay writing directly to her service by saying, "I can write a paper or essay on this because it would be like arguing with the volunteers on why it is important and why it needs to be done." The assignments were in keeping with university and college goals for this required course. At the same time, the writing and service helped students, as demonstrated in the previous example, to build awareness of and critical thinking skills about socially-relevant ideas which they will be encountering everywhere in the culture throughout their lives.

C. Service-Learning for Academic and Career Goals.

In the second example of college-level composition, students began by analyzing their individual academic concerns. In their journal, they wrote about the personal strengths they brought to their studies and career goals, and they brainstormed activities that would strengthen these. They selected a community where their participation focused on ways they wanted to develop as students or pre-professionals and focused on activities that reflected their academic interests at this time in their lives. They began their involvement with the community early in the quarter and selected topics for the required assignments by thinking about their interaction with members of the community.

The FLC's discussion of this course included issues such as how to focus the wide range of students' interests in a selection of community placements. Before starting to teach this course for the first time, the professor made contact with communities in the area that reflect the students' majors. There is a hospice ten minutes away from the college, a local elementary school is situated close by, and Pathways, an organization that assists special needs students, is on the college campus. The students were required to select one of these communities the first year that the course was taught. However, in the second year, the students had the option of finding their own placement communities.

One important disadvantage of having students select their own placement is that faculty are unable to visit before the quarter begins to discuss the goals of the course and to talk to the supervisors about any concerns they may have in advance. In the first year of teaching the course, the professor was able to talk to the coordinator of volunteers at the local hospice before teaching the class. One of this professor's concerns was that students in a ten-week quarter would not have enough time to give to the community for their contribution to be worthwhile. The coordinator stated that she could, indeed, use such student volunteers for as many as forty hours a week, but she realized that this was impossible. The number of hours was not the important factor for her, however. Any amount of time that students were able to give to, for example, visiting patients was valuable for two reasons. In the first place, college students brought the outside world to the patients through their conversation; secondly, links with the

outside community were made though the contact that the hospice had with local colleges. This was important information for the FLC and helped to make decisions about how to organize community involvement in all their classes.

Whether the students found their own placements or selected one from the list, their community involvement was the source of learning, which students used as a data for the required assignments. They worked closely with the supervisors in the communities and selected tasks that reflected their learning objectives. For example, a student who was majoring in multimedia designed a PowerPoint presentation for the hospice to inform the public about hospice care. A student majoring in pre-education worked at the local elementary preschool program and devised activities for the children. The journal assignments documented their experiences and their reactions to these. A pre-pharmacy student worked with a patient in a facility for Alzheimer patients. She recorded in her journal her observations of the patient as she helped her to perform essential tasks. As a pre-pharmacy student, her interest was in the medications that were administered and the effect that these had on the patient. She talked to the nurses at the facility to develop her firsthand observations of the patient. She had three sources of data for her research essay: personal observations and reflections on these in her journal, conversations with personnel at the community placement, and library research. Community service is a requirement for admission into the pharmacy program, and the experiences of this student indicate the strong link between service and academic learning, which is coordinated by reflection.

The final assignment was a project that answered a community need. For example, some students wrote a proposal that summarized a community concern and suggested ways that it might be addressed. Other students assessed the community's Web site. They designed or revised areas and wrote accompanying documents that explained the goals of the project and the ways that their documents had been adapted to reflect these goals and the audience they were addressing. As for all the assignments, the students decided the nature of their participation, and this was determined by the learning they needed to do to complete the required composition assignments and to contribute to the members of their communities' lives.

VI. Pedagogical Implications of Implementing Service-Learning.

A. Integrating Composition Goals and Service-Learning Projects.

The most important pedagogical implication that emerged from our experiences of teaching these service-learning courses related to the integration of the service with the academic priorities of the courses. This is the central goal of the service-learning mission statement and one of the areas with which we wrestled the most. From the students' writing, it was clear that preparatory students need more scaffolding for the type of writing required in reflective journals. Most student entries were too short and superficial, and they did not really help students make connections between the service learning activity and its relationship to their own learning in the course. In the college composition courses, the ten-week time frame limited the extent of the journal writing and in-class discussion that were focused on making connections between practical community engagement and the academic goals of a composition course. We found that using both student and professional texts to integrate academic composition goals more closely with service activities, throughout the course, is a useful way for students to discuss composition

within a framework of community issues. Our university is moving toward semester conversion; a longer time frame offers opportunity for developing these connections more effectively.

The university-wide policy for service-learning states that service-learning courses meet "specified learning outcomes as part of an academic course." In each case, the three courses fulfilled the English composition learning outcomes by incorporating service-learning activities. In this sense, they could be seen as ways to "institutionalize" service-learning by incorporating this tool into sections of the Composition Sequence (Butin, 2006, p. 57). The choice of placements is a crucial decision that influences the quality of the critical thinking and writing that results from this. In the first year that the college-level composition courses were taught, both instructors gave their students a list of placements in communities that related to the respective course goals. In both courses, the lists proved problematic, with some contacts failing to respond promptly to student queries. Some contact information proved to be outdated, despite pre-quarter instructor research before, and after, compiling the list. Several students responded to such obstacles with concern, frustration, and resistance.

Some students found environmental issues difficult or boring, although many found their experiences helped them to understand the wider significance of the theme. The second time this course was taught, the professor had previous students' experiences and writing for reference, and the relevance and importance of the issue was clearer for all the students in the group. In the following year, the students had, from the beginning of the quarter, the option of finding their own placements, and this eliminated the pressure to accommodate their individual interests to a preconceived list of possibilities. The FLC found this decision difficult to make. If placements are planned in advance and the instructor has visited the community, talked with the supervisors, and discussed the projects with which her students may become involved, coordinating class discussion and introducing students to common themes in the range of placements is more easily achieved. The advantage of allowing students to make these decisions is that such decisions are, potentially, an important component for genuine experiential learning to take place (Fiddler & Marienau, 2008). The disadvantage lies in the challenges of focusing a wide range of placement opportunities in the class. We are still wrestling with such important curricular decisions.

An important tool for integrating all areas of any service-learning course is the journal. Whether students select their placements from a list compiled by the instructor or from their own research, they need to think critically about how their choices will fulfill the goals of the course. The journal provides a space for such critical thinking, and all the students were asked to submit a journal entry where they explained their choice of community, the role they would play in this community, and how this contact would help them to develop the course goals. The FLC certainly found, as instructors, that when students make these decisions, the instructor must "engage the student in active reflection on learning goals and assumptions" (Reed & Marienau, 2008, p. 70). The journal integrates the critical thinking that is involved in these courses.

B. The Benefit of Community Engagement for the Community.

The university goal for service-learning is for students to "enhance their sense of civic responsibility." This suggests a different emphasis from Bringle and Hatcher's (1995) focus for service-learning as "an organized activity that meets identified community needs" (p. 51). This issue was an important part of the FLC group discussions. The group could not claim that their students were meeting specific community needs. However, students were in contact with community issues, and their participation was a form of civic responsibility. These situations

were complicated by the fact that students themselves associated service-learning with "a social and civic mission" to help "those in need" (Butin, 2006, p.58), and as Reed and Marienau (2008) report, students are frustrated if they do not perceive how their participation is helping their communities.

One related issue was found in the preparatory reading and writing course. Students did not feel very engaged in the reading program because they did not meet the third grade students. Although the teacher came to speak with the class and introduce the need for the project, most students did not believe that their service was helping the third grade students. Since this was a ten week quarter, there was not enough time to record the stories, deliver them to the elementary school, and to bring third grade responses back to the college students. This failure to close the loop left some students feeling like their reading did not make a difference. The college students were invited to travel to the school the day the books were delivered, but it was after the quarter was over and students had already gone their own ways. Even though some students did not see how the service helped the community, it not only helped the community, it also contributed to the college students' own learning in the course.

C. Students' Civic Responsibility.

Understanding how their involvement helps their community is an important factor for all the courses. One student in the college-level course visited a women's shelter, ate lunch with the participants, and talked to them about their experiences and their lives. The women's shelter appreciated any contact with participants and valued this contact. The student was going into the social service field and was fulfilling the course goals, yet it was difficult for her to understand that being involved and interested are ways of learning and giving to a community. However, our students seem to have an inherent sense of "civic responsibility," which is an integral part of the mission statement on service-learning. Community involvement is a source of learning and of civic responsibility. The FLC defined civic responsibility as a developing awareness of the needs of our communities and the ways that these needs can be met professionally by the students' developing perception of themselves in their academic lives. We were aware of this quality in our students' writing when they were beginning to work on analyzing the audiences for their community projects.

The students needed to analyze the audience of their writing because this is part of the English Composition requirements. From this analysis, they related the interests of their chosen readers to the goals they had for writing. One pre-nursing student, Ying, visited a dying hospice patient and chose to write a document explaining hospice care. She writes:

> The audience I intend to address is the guardian of the dying patient. I chose this type of audience because they are the loved ones of the sick patient that want the best for the patient. They are also the ones that carry the burden in their daily lives. The solution to lightening their burden is receiving help from the hospice program.

In the document addressed to these families, she focuses on misconceptions about hospice and explains how these are inaccurate. She writes:

> One misconception is that being in hospice care means giving up hope. It is undeniable that patients who are in the hospice program have no longer than six or fewer months to live, but it is necessary to be in this program. This program deals with the whole person and not just his or her physical illness. Focusing on

the patient's physical, emotional, and practical needs does this. Even after the patient's death, hospice continues with bereavement service and grief support for the family members for fourteen months.

Ying was absorbed by the service-learning project because she saw the future professional links. As a writer, she fulfilled the goals of the assignment by selecting and writing about issues that related to her goal and to the people she was addressing. In addition, she was learning about the responsibility for aging people that is shared by members of her profession, their families, and the wider community, which fulfilled our requirement of civic responsibility.

Similarly, in the environmental issues course, students commented on how the readings, writing, class discussions, and service pushed them to think about environmental problems in a way they had not previously. For example, one student noted about her work in an elementary classroom educating young students on recycling:

I like the community engagement project because it parallels a lot of the topics we discuss in class and truly appeals to me personally. This project allows us to work on our persuasive/argumentative techniques because, with the type of project I am doing, you really have to sell your concept and opinion to your audience. You have to show them that their actions affect other things and other people, both negatively and positively.

Another student noted in her journal that, "Taking this English class has not only showed me how to write a better paper. It has shown me how to become a better citizen and be more concerned about the environment."

VII. Conclusion.

A FLC is deeply embedded in the academic life of our open-access college. Active participation in such communities is valued as a source of professional development. For this reason, a FLC is in a unique position to include faculty members from different disciplines who are also involved in implementing department, college, and university goals. Our three member FLC has developed into a college-wide Service-Learning Faculty Learning Community with nine members representing six different disciplines. The wider group meets to discuss ways to implement service-learning in different courses. Over the last year, the university-wide SL initiative has developed further and a centralized Service Learning Advisory Council has been established to coordinate the service-learning initiatives across campuses; members of our FLC represent the open-access college at the meetings.

Members of this FLC focused on ways that university, college, and department policy on service-learning can be applied at the college where they teach. This involvement has included research at different levels and extensive discussion to integrate this for practical teaching purposes. This is a debate that is continuing in different areas of the university, and the FLC has been the channel for its members to join in the discussion in different university roles.

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