

Humanities in the Field: Enhancing learning through Community Service

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INTRODUCTION

When I started to identify areas of interest for me to write about for my honors thesis, I decided that I wanted to work at the intersection of my two majors: social welfare and English. Yet, I quickly realized that for many people there is not a readily available relationship between the two. I recognized this same issue when I took a service learning class in the English Department; many students did not recognize how the skills, theories, and manners of thinking that we were learning could be applied outside of the classroom in a non-profit organization, which is the primary environment for the application of service learning. Yet, some of my greatest and most impactful academic experiences at the University of Kansas have been in service learning classes, which enable students to volunteer or create their own project to do good in the community. To me, service learning should be implemented in classrooms even when the connection to the community is not entirely clear, especially with the current trend toward increased instruction on civic engagement in higher education (Braskamp, 2011). Larry A. Braskamp, president of the Global Perspective Institute and senior fellow at the Association of American Colleges and Universities, explains this phenomenon: "When it comes to forming and informing future citizens of the United States and of the globe ... now is not the time for hesitation. Now is the time for higher education to be both responsible and responsive to society at

large, a critic of societal ills and a voice of what is good and worthy within current economic, political, social and religious contexts" (2011, p. 1). Now it is time for students and instructors alike to respond and interact with the community surrounding their education.

I aspire to make it easier for instructors and students to understand and communicate the goals of service learning and reflect on them in the classroom, specifically when there is not a readily available connection in the community. My intention is to design a template that students and instructors can utilize during service-learning classes in order to build a successful relationship and to promote effective service learning practices with an organization in the community. In order to do so, I have researched key concepts, conducted interviews with primary constituents, and deciphered the necessary components to include in the template. In doing so, I hope to enable more students to build strong connections in the community, practice classroom skills in real-world contexts, and strengthen their ability to reflect on their work, as well as increase the benefits of service learning for students, instructors, community organizations, and the university.

Service Learning

Service learning is not easily defined, because a vital concept of service learning is its flexibility in application. In 1990, "Jane Kendall wrote that there are 147 definitions in the literature [for service learning], and there has been no falling away of interest in this endeavor

since" (Eyler, et al., 1999, p. 3). One of the most common references used to define service learning is from the *National Service Clearinghouse: America's Most Comprehensive Service-Learning Resource*. According to this organization, "Service-Learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities." This is also the definition that the University of Kansas utilizes in the Center for Service Learning. Although I agree with this definition, it ignores the potential personal growth that students may have when taking service-learning courses, which is frequently reflected in the literature. Another definition offers the incorporation of personal development: service learning is an educational strategy involving youth programming that encompasses a philosophy of youth empowerment. Service-learning can help students develop the assets needed for a productive future (Byers, Griffen-Wiesner, & Nelson, 2000). This definition incorporates the potential for the personal growth of a student, which is vital in my understanding of service learning.

In order to better comprehend the ever-evolving and redefined concept of service learning, it is important to inspect its two primary components: service and learning. Service can be better understood as community service, and learning as field education. Janet Eyler and Dwight E. Giles, Jr. "have embraced the position that service-learning should include a balance between service to the community and academic learning and that the hyphen in the phrase symbolizes the central role of reflection in the process of learning through community

experience" (1999, p. 4). There are clear aspects of connection and distinction between both community service and learning through field education, and both must be defined in order to better comprehend the overall concept of service learning.

Community service

Community service is an integral fixture of service learning. Community service can be defined as "the engagement of [people] in activities that primarily focus on the service being provided as well as the benefits the service activities have on the recipients" (Furco, p. 13). Community service programs imply altruism and charity, much like volunteerism, so it is vital to differentiate between the two. Although the understanding of volunteerism and community service are largely similar, community service in the context of service learning involves the additional goals of reflection on the meaning of the service activities and the larger social issues surrounding the service project. For example, what is hindering or oppressing the recipient of the service, is there a lack of social services aimed at the needs of particular recipients, or is there a better solution to the problem that the social service agency is not providing? Volunteerism, while beneficial, does not require the same type of consideration and understanding that is put forth in community service in a service learning setting. It can also be inferred that community service requires more time and the application of more skills, research, and knowledge, because a service learning participant will need to utilize external resources in order to fully comprehend the significant social issues involved in their community service projects. Community service also implies the personal growth of a participant,

because participants independently learn to make knowledge and reflection meaningful in a setting other than in the classroom. In this way, students have the opportunity to demonstrate their success through action.

Within the realm of service learning it is expected that students will involve themselves with community service; “one of the major forms of service-learning practice from its beginnings has focused not only on learning about social problems, but on addressing them in the community through social action” (Eyler, et al., 1999, p. 11). It is expected that students do not only research the social issues related to the population they are working with and that their organization attempts to alleviate, but they must also implement strategies that they deem as effective. A student’s ideas about addressing a social issue or about addressing a problem with the way their organization is addressing a social issue must mirror the action they commit to at the organization. There is a vital action element that students must partake in in order to effectively complete the community service component of their service-learning course.

Learning: Field education

Learning is also a major component in service learning, and it is typically demonstrated through field education in service learning courses. It is important to note, however, that field education is most commonly used as a model in the service learning courses that have a practical application. Liberal arts and humanities should, like engineering or medicine, define and practice its application to social life. This would make teachers, students, and the general public more aware of the importance of areas of study whose practical application is not immediately apparent. Yet, humanities

and liberal arts are difficult studies to apply in the community. Field education programs “provide students with co-curricular service opportunities that are related to, but not fully integrated with their formal academic studies. Students perform the service as part of a program that is designed primarily to enhance students’ understanding of a field of study, while also providing substantial emphasis on the service being provided” (Furco, p. 13). Field education allows students to take the skills and knowledge they learn in their courses and implement them outside of the classroom. This enables students to recognize the impact their implementation of skills can have in a community, as well as cement those skills for a student; when they practice them in a community environment then they can better incorporate them into their future careers and challenges. This also enables students to understand what skills work for them and what they need to improve upon.

The service learning approach to learning is not traditional in academia because it is concerned with the personal development of a person, as well as the connectedness of lessons learned in the classroom to realistic applications in the community, rather than simply cognitive development. Service learning is a method of education that rests on the principles of learning established by experiential learning theorists (Eyler, et al., 1999). Dewey, an experiential learning theorist, “was convinced that learning is a wholehearted affair, linking emotions and intellect; an educative experience is one that fosters student development by capturing student interest—indeed their passion—because it is intrinsically worthwhile and deals with problems that awaken student curiosity” (Eyler, et al., 1999, p. 8). Learning within the service-

learning context supports the personal development of students; students are both encouraged to find their passion and to apply it to learning within the classroom. In this way, the goal of service learning “is to link personal and interpersonal development with academic and cognitive development” because the two are inherently related (Eyler, et al., 1999, p. 9). Personal growth and cognitive growth are both outcomes of effective learning, yet cognitive growth alone is the primary concern of the majority of faculty members at universities. Service learning courses, however, also incorporate the personal outcomes of learning, which is unique to this type of program.

Service Learning in the Classroom

Service learning can take many forms in a classroom context; in fact, Amanda Schwegler, the Assistant Director of the Center for Service Learning at the University of Kansas, recognizes that there is a lack of consistency between the different service learning courses because there are no strict guidelines; she does not view this as problematic (personal communication, October 10, 2011). The only guidelines that exist at the Center for Service Learning at the University of Kansas include: the necessity for students to utilize their classroom skills to meet community needs, the need for students to volunteer at least 20 hours of their time, and the opportunity for reflection after students complete their volunteer work (Center for Service Learning). If a faculty member meets these requirements in a course, then the course is eligible for service learning designation, and students then have the opportunity to take the course in order to fulfill an aspect of their certification.

Jeffrey Howard is the Associate Director for Service-Learning at the

University of Michigan's Edward Ginsberg Center for Community Service and Learning, where he is responsible for faculty development, publications, communications, and the Center's service-learning portfolio of academic and co-curricular service-learning initiatives (Campus Compact). He offers his opinion on principles of good practice in community service learning pedagogy. These include: (1) academic credit is for learning not service; (2) do not compromise academic rigor; (3) set learning goals for students; (4) establish criteria for the selection of community service placements; (5) provide educationally sound mechanisms to harvest the community learning; (6) provide supports for students to learn how to harvest the community learning; (7) minimize the distinction between students' community learning role and the classroom learning role; (8) rethink the faculty instructional role; (9) be prepared for uncertainty and variation in student learning outcomes; and (10) maximize the community responsibility orientation of the course (Howard, p 102-104). When these principles are incorporated into service learning classes, then Howard believes the students and faculty can achieve the greatest outcomes. Primarily, students need to draw connections between learning and service in order for students and faculty to effectively implement a service-learning course. There should not be a clear distinction between these aspects of the course, and faculty should support their students through their recognition of the connectedness between the two. These principles also offer students the opportunity to explore various roles as learner and instructor, as well as invest in their own learning. The outcomes of these principles are incorporated into effective

service learning classes, and any service learning faculty member should strive to implement them in his or her courses.

There is still a significant challenge in incorporating service learning into certain classrooms. Faculty that have had the most positive feedback of service learning classes are “in disciplines with logical connections to external issues and audiences: social work; nursing, medicine, and other health professions; public administration; education, and so forth” (Holland, p. 253) A question that needs to be answered, then, is how can professors in disciplines that lack “logical” or established connections to external issues and audiences effectively incorporate service learning into their courses? What does that look like for their students? Considering that service learning has so many benefits, it would be good for students if faculty in other academic disciplines would develop connections outside their disciplines and work them into their teaching.

Beneficiaries of Service Learning

It is my belief that service learning is a mutually beneficial process. Service learning promotes benefits for students, faculty, the university, and the community, and all beneficiaries support the growth of each other. The Center for Service Learning at the University of Kansas and other service learning program models provide commentary on the benefits of service learning for these various participants.

Benefits to students The benefits for students in service learning are the prominent concern of most projects and courses. The KU Center for Service Learning recognizes the benefit in students’ receiving service learning certification; “certification in service learning offers a chance for students to utilize their classroom skills to address

community needs and gain recognition at the same time. It allows students to apply classroom knowledge in ‘real-world’ settings and gain experience and familiarity with their community” (Witczak, 2008, p. 8). Service learning provides students with the means to utilize the skills they gain in a course outside of the walls of a classroom. Also, students have the opportunity to gain certification in service learning to honor the time, energy, and effort they put into service learning courses and projects. Not only does service learning enable students to gain skill, proficiency, and academic credit, but it also enhances their personal development.

Although documenting personal growth and development is challenging, Judith A. Nelson and Daniel Eckstein, both professors in the Educational Leadership and Counseling Department at Sam Houston State University, sought to discover how service learning could benefit at-risk adolescents and students in secondary school. The status as an “at-risk” adolescent is indicated when a student faces challenges in completing graduation and requires support from outside resources in order to achieve graduation eligibility. Nelson and Eckstein created a competition among students as a model for service learning; they announced to students that they had the opportunity to receive funding for service projects. Students completed a checklist about various social and environmental issues that concerned them in order to decide which organization they would like to work with and what type of project they would like to complete. After the proposals were finalized, students made presentations to the Service-Learning Advisory Board, who voted to fund two projects. After the projects were chosen, every student had the opportunity to get

involved in helping with each project. Students reported feeling greater importance, self-confidence, and responsibility than they had before. Nelson and Eckstein noted, “service-learning allows youth to have a ‘voice’ in the school and community, which increases the chances for them to feel connected and important to the workings of their schools, neighborhoods, and cities” (2008, p. 235). Therefore service learning gave these at-risk students positive outcomes that any student, including those at the university level, could benefit from, including a sense of empowerment and personal growth.

Benefits to faculty The Center for Service Learning at KU also recognizes the advantages of service learning for faculty; “through developing and executing service learning courses, faculty members gain appreciation for their discipline and for their students, become engaged in their communities both locally and globally, develop diverse connections with the community and other faculty members, and are provided with additional research and funding opportunities” (Witczak, 2008, p. 8). The interconnectedness of service learning largely benefits faculty, as they have the opportunity to build stronger relationships with students and can incorporate the lessons they teach into real-world environments and situations. Each student will react differently to service learning, and students should have the opportunity to address these variations in the classroom. Faculty can learn from the incorporation of service learning into classroom discussions. Some faculty have said, “that outreach and public service is relevant to the success of their discipline and the quality of their teaching and research agenda” (Holland, p. 253). Faculty can greatly benefit from

incorporating service learning into their courses not only to demonstrate effective skills and lessons to their students but also to further their own research and quality of teaching. For example, service learning helps faculty articulate the authentic and genuine importance of their discipline, which can enlighten the public and effectively advocate for resources to support education.

Benefits to the university When assessing benefits for service learning, assets to the university are largely absent in most research. The Center for Service Learning at KU, however, strives to recognize its impact on the university. For example,

The benefits of service learning provided to the University are nationally recognized. According to the Princeton Review’s 2006 edition of 361 Best Colleges, the University of Kansas was named a ‘College with a Conscience,’ placing KU among the top 81 schools

in the country in regards to service learning programs and blending academics with community service. Additionally, over 7,000 University of Kansas students donated their time to community service during the 2005-2006 year, earning the University a spot on the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. (Witczak, 2008, p. 8)

As the Center for Service Learning expands its curriculum and certification opportunities for students, the university is largely benefitting. The University of Kansas is now a consistently recognized campus for its positive impact on the surrounding community of Lawrence, as well as its increased rates of volunteerism among its students. Any positive publicity that KU can receive will ultimately make it a more successful university that will attract more students. Any university that

incorporates service learning can also expect to have greater connections to the community as more students volunteer at local agencies. Community connection is a worthy benefit for the University of Kansas as community support, financially and otherwise, plays a key role in maintaining the university.

Benefits to community When students partake in a service learning class or project then they are expected to serve in the community. Receiving willing volunteers is the initial advantage for communities, and the Center for Service Learning recognizes this positive aspect:

Service learning projects utilize the knowledge and capabilities of the university to meet specified community needs. In doing so, service learning creates beneficial relationships

between members of the university and members of the community. These relationships foster a variety of other positive outcomes for community organizations including

allowing organizations to identify and access additional resources necessary to achieve their mission and goals; creating a larger base from which to draw future volunteers, leaders, and supports; and allowing organizations to play an integral role in shaping how students perceive current world issues and topics. (Witczak, 2008, p. 8)

Community is of vast importance in the success of service learning, as students must apply their skills from class into a community setting. Yet, the community also benefits as they receive encouraging, supportive, and engaged volunteers from campus. Schwegler explains that many students continue to volunteer and offer support to the organizations they get involved in during their service learning projects (personal communication, October 10, 2011).

Therefore, the relationships that are built in these classrooms often continue beyond the course itself, and the student and community organization greatly benefit from their bond.

Case Study: Working with KU Audio-Reader and the Center for Service Learning

I personally have continued my relationship with my service learning community organization, and I will use that relationship to fuel my understanding of service learning at the university. I have taken four service-learning classes in the past and am certified in service learning. One of my former service learning classes is Jewish-American Literature and Culture with Professor Cheryl Lester. Students in this class met with KU Audio-Reader to undertake and complete service learning projects. I intend to build off of my relationship with them in order to demonstrate what service learning should look like in and outside of the classroom. My objective in meeting with KU Audio-Reader and Center for Service Learning representatives is to evaluate what effective service-learning relationships look like between students, faculty, local social service agencies, and the university. The information I receive will ultimately enable me to create a template that can be used to implement or improve service-learning classes at the university. Although this is only one example of a service learning relationship, it provides me with the means to have in-depth conversations with various involved constituents and to have access to their personal perspectives.

The University of Kansas Center for Service Learning

Before I delve into the discussion of my personal experiences with service

learning, it is important to establish how service learning works at KU. The Center for Service Learning at the University of Kansas opened in July 2005, so it is a relatively new feature of the university. The center resulted from a culmination of public and community service projects that started at the university in 1990. Since 1990, the university has provided prominent resources for students and faculty that contributed to the creation of service learning. These include the creation of the Center for Community Outreach, course credit offered for participants of Alternative Breaks, financial support provided by Student Senate to start a student-run Office of Service Learning in conjunction with the Center for Community Outreach, and Service Learning Institutes held for the faculty of the university (Center for Service Learning). Now, the Center for Service Learning offers students and faculty support and resources in constructing and implementing service learning courses. They also assist the Registrar in documenting service learning classes and student participation in those classes.

Different universities view service learning in different ways, so it is important to clarify the mission statement of the Center for Service Learning at KU as well as their understanding of service learning in the classroom; “Our mission is to make service learning a priority and core practice at the University of Kansas. Service learning fosters better understanding of classroom material, is a catalyst for innovative leadership and social responsibility, and drives positive change in the world. We inspire action by creating initiatives that connect, advocate, elevate, and challenge” (Center for Service Learning). Although much of the mission

statement is similar to previously mentioned definitions of service learning, their mission does include the potential for service learning to sponsor leadership. Students taking on a leadership role could exemplify their personal growth and development, so it is a significant thought to consider.

One of the most imperative features that the Center for Service Learning offers is a certification to recognize students that participate in service learning classes and requirements. Students must complete three of the following components in order to get certified: enrollment in and completion of at least one designated service learning class, completion of an independent project, and reflection (Center for Service Learning). Each of these components can be achieved in various formats. For example, if a student takes more than one service learning class, then his or her second class can fulfill the independent project requirement. The Center for Service Learning also addresses various reasons why students should get certified. Certification recognizes that students have “gone beyond the classroom to help [their] community and to further [their] own education; assisted community agencies in better serving their clients; exposed [themselves] to societal inadequacies and injustices; better prepared [themselves] for [their] career or further education; taken greater responsibility for [their] learning and for [their] community; and applied [their] course content in the context of the real world” (Center for Service Learning). The certification will appear on a student’s transcript so future employers or graduate school admissions committees will be able to identify a student’s efforts in service learning.

The Center for Service Learning faculty prides themselves in their student-centered certification, and they have greatly expanded the program since 2005 in order to incorporate more participants; in the beginning, the Center for Service Learning included 20 designated service learning courses, and they now offer about 65 service learning courses per semester (Center for Service Learning). More students than ever are receiving certification and participating in service learning courses, and the Center for Service Learning hopes the growth of the program will continue at KU.

Previous Service-Learning Experience with KU Audio-Reader

During the spring semester of my junior year, I took a Jewish-American Literature course that incorporated service learning into the curriculum. Every student in the course got involved in a service project at KU Audio-Reader, a local non-profit agency. Many students in my course did not understand the relationship between the lessons we were learning in class and our work at KU Audio-Reader. The connection between the two was not obvious, so it was our task as students to learn how our role at KU Audio-Reader might enhance our understanding or reading of Jewish-American literature, or vice versa. This was difficult for many of us. We must clarify the purpose of both KU-Audio Reader and the Jewish-American Literature class in order to understand the conflict and harmony of the two.

KU Audio-Reader “offers print-disabled persons the opportunity for greater personal independence by providing access to the printed word and visual information, via electronic media and other technologies” (Audio-Reader: Radio for the blind and print-disabled). Primarily, volunteers read daily

newspapers, magazines, and books on the air and on the internet, which are available 24 hours a day. Clients also have the opportunity to receive a radio to hear the readings or to call into an automated newspaper reading by telephone. Services are free and available to anyone in the listening area, which includes individuals in Kansas and western Missouri (Audio-Reader: Radio for the blind and print-disabled).

The Jewish-American Literature course served as an English, an American Studies, and a Jewish Studies class. According to the syllabus, “this course focuses on the role of literature, language, and culture in the construction of modern Jewish identities in the United States, focusing primarily on the period from 1880 to the present. The role of literature, language, and culture in the formation of identities is a key area of inquiry in both English and American Studies.” The course was split up into units including: Lech Lecha! Immigration tales, Mass Culture and Jewish Embodiment, Zachor! Memorializing Survivors, Amnesia and Remembrance, and By the Rivers of Babylon: Zionism and post-Zionist Discourse. There is also a description of the service learning component in the syllabus: “It is your responsibility to volunteer 20 hours outside of class in a setting that provides opportunities for you to take an active part in a process through which we both serve the needs of the agency and contribute to its transformation with regard to such matters as the content of the readings, delivery of services, self-promotion, representation of their constituencies, etc.” Previous students of the course started a service learning relationship with KU Audio-Reader, and it was our duty as the most recent course to continue that relationship.

When my class first went to KU Audio-Reader, we met with the Programming Manager, Lori Kesinger and the Coordinator of Volunteers, Jennifer Nigro. We learned about the overall program and had the opportunity to take a tour of the facility. Then the class split into smaller groups that focused on different projects that we would be completing at KU Audio-Reader. I found myself in the Outreach group. The purpose of the Outreach group was to find more listenership across the community by producing press releases for newspapers in the Lawrence, Topeka, and Kansas City area.

My fellow group members and Kesinger determined which newspapers we would try to contact via press releases in order to advertise and increase the audience interested in Jewish programming. We jumped to the obvious choices: *The Kansas City Jewish Chronicle* and *The Forward*. Each student in the group focused on one or two different newspapers to contact, but *The Kansas City Jewish Chronicle* and *The Forward* were the only newspapers we contacted that had a strong connection to diverse audiences. I contacted *The Lawrence Journal-World*, and they did in fact respond to my press release. Although my press release was reflected in the newspaper, the article was more about service learning at the university and there was no information on why people should utilize KU Audio-Reader services. In our final oral presentation to the class about our work at KU Audio-Reader, my group largely agreed that we could have done more to enhance KU Audio-Reader through our service learning project. Our intention was to broaden the diversity of KU Audio-Reader listeners, but I think we had two major faults (1) we only sought out Jewish newspapers to reach our

diverse audiences, and (2) we only reached out to newspapers, instead of newsletters or community meetings.

It is easiest in service learning classes to address the readily available connection and concern with a local social service agency, such as reaching out to Jewish audiences in a Jewish-American Literature course. However, students might be more active and empowered if they had a chance to propose other material and communities that should be targeted for inclusion. We were discussing ideas about diversity, but in our service learning we did not focus on any diverse issues beyond the idea of getting more Jewish listenership at KU Audio-Reader. It is my belief that more can be gained from these relationships, if only instructors, students, the university, and local social service agencies had an understanding of how service learning should work or could work in various contexts.

KU Audio-Reader and Service Learning

In order to better understand service learning from the perspective of social service agencies, I interviewed Kesinger about her experiences with service learning at KU Audio-Reader. As the Programming Manager, she regulates what is presented out of KU Audio-Reader. She helps with the book selection, and she reads the newspapers every morning to determine what articles need to be broadcast.

First, Kesinger expanded my understanding of the population KU Audio-Reader serves. She explained, “we primarily work with people 70 and over, usually from rural communities, and they tend to be conservative” (L. Kesinger, personal communication, October 10, 2011). Although KU Audio-Reader is able to serve any vision impaired person, the population that is served is typically from

the aging community; people that once had clearer vision that are now losing their sight. Kesinger also noted that these populations are not technologically savvy. She says, "They won't access podcasts" (L. Kesinger, personal communication, October 10, 2011). Therefore, they need to offer other means for obtaining their resources, which is why they offer radio and telephone options. Outside of the aging community, Kesinger noted that they have also recorded textbooks onto flash drives for students in the surrounding area.

Before delving into more specific questions, I asked Kesinger "How do you view service learning at KU Audio-Reader?" Kesinger has had lots of experience with service learning, and she was particularly involved in it when she worked in Virginia. Since then, "it has evolved a lot" (L. Kesinger, personal communication, October 10, 2011). In Virginia, Kesinger ran a class where she invited service agencies to come into the classroom and speak. Now, service learning is focused on students going out in the community to enact a service project in relation to the material they are learning in the classroom. Kesinger thinks "this is good for students to participate in, but it is difficult to create a program that is useful to students and organizations. It is a challenge because you want to lead [students] to make conclusions on their own, but it is hard to teach them about service learning without directly saying the purpose" (L. Kesinger, personal communication, October 10, 2011). Kesinger wants students to create their own projects at KU Audio-Reader, but when students do not recognize the connection or purpose in doing so, then the value of the activity is put into jeopardy. Kesinger recognizes how KU Audio-Reader and Jewish-American

literature intersect, but what is she to do when the students do not make this connection on their own?

During our conversation, Kesinger noted that "blindness is a culture" (L. Kesinger, personal communication, October 10, 2011). This is a valid place to start, but a place that we never addressed during my Jewish-American Literature class. As a group, we focused on the idea of incorporating more Jewish listenership into KU Audio-Reader rather than broader cultural connections. The Assistant Development Director, Feloniz Lovato-Winston, did acknowledge a stronger connection; she sees "literature as a passing down of culture; literature is linked to identity" (F. Lovato-Winston, personal communication, October 10, 2011). Both Kesinger and Lovato-Winston recognized that these service-learning partnerships also enhance their understanding of KU Audio-Reader, because it forces them to evaluate their view of the organization's purpose and the changes that could benefit their organization.

Outside of the Jewish-American literature course, KU Audio-Reader has hosted a marketing class that made brochures for their agency as a final class project. Three different groups created brochures after learning more about KU Audio-Reader, and then KU Audio-Reader representatives had the opportunity to choose which group's brochure they would like to use. KU Audio-Reader has also hosted PR interns in the past. Kesinger stated, "we love having these partnerships" (L. Kesinger, personal communication, October 10, 2011). There is a significant distinction between the partnerships KU Audio-Reader hosts with a Jewish-American Literature class versus a marketing class. The marketing class was able to serve an instrumental goal for

KU Audio-Reader, by providing them with material that serves the organization as it's defined. The Jewish American-Literature course serves a civic or philosophical goal for KU Audio-Reader by providing them with material that challenges them and potentially reforms the organization as it's defined. KU Audio-Reader is able to work in two very different partnerships with one course using action based on critical thinking and the other course using action based on instrumental reason. This also exemplifies how service learning can be problematic for disciplines without readily available connections in the community; while the marketing class was able to achieve a concrete goal, the Jewish-American literature course has had slower progress and continues to define and redefine their relationship with KU Audio-Reader.

Kesinger recognized three key areas that students have supported KU Audio-Reader in: (1) several students have stayed on to volunteer as readers for the program after their service learning project was completed, (2) students act as good ambassadors of the program to community groups, student organizations, and the university, and (3) students sponsor publicity, especially to Jewish members in the community. Kesinger also noted that students made a video one year that KU Audio-Reader continues to use, which has left a lasting impact on their organization (L. Kesinger, personal communication, October 10, 2011).

I asked Kesinger to evaluate KU Audio-Reader's relationship with students, faculty, the Lawrence community, and the university, because I see these four as the primary service learning constituents. I wanted to hear how they are connected from the view of

a social service agency. KU Audio-Reader has limited interaction with students, unless they are volunteers. They do work with volunteering youth groups for their major fund-raising events during the year. As for faculty, they have even more limited interaction. Kesinger noted, "some faculty members do volunteer here. I think it is a good way to get away from what they do academically" (L. Kesinger, personal communication, October 10, 2011). KU Audio-Reader gets the vast majority of volunteers and listeners from the Lawrence community. Other agencies also make referrals for visually impaired Lawrence residents to use KU Audio-Reader services. However, Kesinger would like more input and conversations with the Lawrence community (L. Kesinger, personal communication, October 10, 2011). According to Kesinger, the university likes KU Audio-Reader because they serve all of Kansas. Former Chancellor Hemenway particularly appreciated KU Audio-Reader, and when he would travel across Kansas he would recognize how many listeners used KU Audio-Reader in the cities he travelled to. In order for service learning to be effective, then every constituent, students, faculty, the university, and the social service agency, need to be invested in the process.

My final question for Kesinger was: "What aspects of service learning are worthy to assess?" She immediately stated, "students doing the work need to understand the mission of the organization" (L. Kesinger, personal communication, October 10, 2011). Students do not take the time to facilitate their own understanding of the organization they are working with. This lack of understanding can hinder the partnership in service learning. Again, Kesinger noted that she does not want to

define service learning at KU Audio-Reader for the students that volunteer; the organization, student, and instructor leading the course should define each service learning experience.

The Center for Service Learning's Understanding of Service Learning Courses

In order to comprehend the university's application of service learning, I interviewed the Assistant Director of the Center for Service Learning, Amanda Schwegler. As stated previously, the only guidelines that exist at the Center for Service Learning at the University of Kansas include, the necessity for students to utilize their classroom skills to meet community needs, the need for students to volunteer at least 20 hours of their time at one location, and the opportunity for reflection after students complete their volunteer work (Center for Service Learning). Service can come in various forms including direct service, indirect service, and advocacy. How these guidelines are applied and implemented is largely up to the instructor of the course.

Schwegler offered me insight into the service learning guidelines, which enabled my understanding of the purpose for these guidelines. First, the course must be credit bearing. Second, the effort of the student needs to be for the common good, and surprisingly this area has been rather gray in past experiences. Thirdly, students must commit their 20 volunteer hours to one specific location, because it provides the students with a better sense of the social service agency. Fourthly, there is a reflection component that differentiates service learning from volunteering. This enables students to take their experiences back with them into the classroom (A. Schwegler,

personal communication, October 10, 2011).

Schwegler recognizes that students must be invested in the partnership for service learning to be successful. Students "can expect to get out what they put into it. They may or may not allow it to impact them" (A. Schwegler, personal communication, October 10, 2011). The hope is that students relate their course discipline to the real world to serve the community, yet many students struggle to draw these connections, particularly in courses without readily available applications in the community. If a student commits to service learning, then they can also expect to "broaden their horizons and gain new experiences" (A. Schwegler, personal communication, October 10, 2011). This is a representation of personal growth.

Faculty, the university, and the community also have expected outcomes according to Schwegler. Faculty members "get the same experience as students because they relate their discipline to service" (A. Schwegler, personal communication, October 10, 2011). They also benefit by seeing the impact service learning can have on their students, which enables them to incorporate it into their future curriculum. Schwegler discussed the town-gown split in relation to service learning's impact on the university. The town-gown split implies that there are distinct differences between the community and campus in university towns. Service learning can ease the divide as students are encouraged to go into the community to do service. According to Schwegler, the community benefits in two major ways: they receive volunteers and students encourage good publicity by getting the organization's mission out. It is also my belief that students can critically engage

with the mission, scope, and reach of the organization in order to potentially reform and better the organization itself. This is particularly relevant in the application of the liberal arts and humanities in service learning partnerships.

Schwegler would like to see some changes to service learning at the university. Schwegler noted that the Center for Service Learning could benefit from an assessment. In service learning, “it is hard to show cause and effect and which service learning techniques work; we need to refine it” (A. Schwegler, personal communication, October 10, 2011). Schwegler would also like to see more faculty involvement. If the Center for Service Learning reaches out to faculty that might be interested, then it will “broaden the appeal of incorporating service learning into the coursework” (A. Schwegler, personal communication, October 10, 2011). *Bold Aspirations*, the new KU Strategic Plan, seeks to establish a new KU core curriculum for all undergraduate students that could also encourage more faculty to incorporate service learning into their courses. One of their six educational goals for undergraduate students is “practice social responsibility and demonstrate ethical behavior.” It is my belief that an increase in service learning courses could aid the university in achieving this goal in core curriculum.

Schwegler agrees that there is a lack of consistency in service learning courses, because “the faculty define what it looks like in their classroom, so a huge range of service learning is implemented” (A. Schwegler, personal communication, October 10, 2011). Schwegler views the reflection component as the most varied; some choose to write, some host a discussion, and some present on their

work. Schwegler does not view the variation as altogether problematic, because “we want students to have an element of choice” (A. Schwegler, personal communication, October 10, 2011). The only way variation could be problematic is if the instructor does not follow the guidelines of service learning, which include the amount of hours that must be committed to service work and the necessity for a reflection component.

A couple weeks after our first interview, I asked Schwegler “What steps do you think are necessary in building a positive working relationship between a student and an organization?” She included four elements that help to sponsor good relationships: (1) students need to have an understanding of the organization, its purpose, and the larger issues it is trying to address, (2) students need to understand service learning and its use as a teaching method, (3) student voice and choice should be implemented in all stages of planning and implementing the service learning project when possible, and (4) the relationship is more effective when students are able to work with the same organization across multiple semesters (A. Schwegler, personal communication, October 28, 2011). Taking these elements into account, it seems that the major concern of Schwegler is misunderstanding and miscommunication between faculty, students, and community organizations. In order for a service learning partnership to be effective, then, there needs to be an understanding between each constituent.

Template Components

Taking my interviews with KU Audio-Reader and the Center for Service Learning into account, I have established areas or components that I would like to include in my template for building

positive working relationships in service learning projects:

1. Students need to have an understanding of the organization. Before starting the project, students should have a grasp of the mission and vision of the social service agency. They should also recognize the larger issues that the organization is addressing. Students should have the opportunity to ask questions of the organization.
2. Students need to have an understanding of service learning. This should be a facilitated discussion with the instructor of the course and other students. Service learning is malleable, so students should determine their understanding of service learning and how it should be applied in their classroom.
3. Faculty should include students in the planning and implementing stage of service learning whenever possible.
4. Faculty should encourage students to demonstrate their learning at the social service agency in the middle of the course, so fellow students and faculty have the chance to respond to their work before the end of the semester.
5. Students should be encouraged to continue their relationship with their social service agency beyond the end of the course.
6. Representatives from the social service agency should be invited into the classroom whenever possible, so they can understand the course structure.
7. Students, faculty, and the social service agency need to sign a contract that explains how their service learning relationship will work and what the ultimate goal is for each of the constituents.

Template

Considering that service learning is intended to have elements of choice, I have constructed a timeline on how to implement a service learning course. During each set date, instructors, students, and the social service agency will have the opportunity to decide exactly what they would like the day's event to look like, but the template will provide general guidelines and ideas. The template is constructed for a typical 15-week course, and it should be applicable to any discipline or any course that meets at least once a week. Although this timeline only includes the weeks in which the course is taking place, a service learning instructor should also plan to meet with a representative from the Center for Service Learning before the course to ensure that he or she understands the guidelines and that the course is registered as a service learning course.

Week	Goal	Activities
1	Introduce students to the course and service learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go through the syllabus, and highlight service learning assignments Explain the general service learning guidelines to the student Prepare them to reflect on their understanding of service learning for next class
2	Define service learning for the course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host a discussion where students are encouraged to define their idea of service learning and how it relates to the course If the instructor has not already decided which social service agency students will be working with, then the students should decipher that relationship after their discussion of service learning Students and instructor should decide how they would like the reflection component of service learning to look in the class, as well as decipher how other service learning assignments should work in the classroom setting
3	Finalize service agency choice(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students and instructor should clarify if they will seek out a social service agency as a class or individually As a class, decide what the relationship should look like with a social service agency in a service learning setting Students or instructor will contact the social service agency they intend to work with and confirm that the agency is comfortable with the relationship and commitment Set up a time to meet one-on-one with a social service agency representative
4	Invite Center for Service Learning representative to class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service learning is a complicated program to define, so the instructor should invite a Center for Service Learning (CSL) representative to speak in class about how service learning works at KU The CSL representative will also provide students with information on service learning certification Students should be encouraged to ask questions about service learning
5	Draft and sign contracts with social service agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students need to collaborate with their social service agency representative to draft a contract, which will include goals, tasks, and opportunities for the student in working with the agency The student, instructor, and social service agency representative all need to sign the contract to ensure that it is implemented in the remaining weeks
6	Include service learning experiences in class discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructor should always encourage students to discuss their service learning experiences in relation to the class discussion about readings, course materials, etc. Instructor can pose questions within the lecture or discussion about service learning to support students in drawing their own connections between their work in and out of class
7	Midterm assignment/exam (include aspects of service learning)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service learning should be included in the midterm assignment or exam <i>or</i> instructors can host a mid-semester evaluation where students reflect on the incorporation of service learning into the classroom and their own service learning experiences
8	Instructor leads discussion on service learning given the midterm information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Given the midterm assignments or evaluations, the instructor should host a discussion where students can verbally reflect on the incorporation of service learning into the classroom and their own service learning experiences

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The instructor and students alike should contribute to the conversation recognizing that every person has a unique experience with and understanding of service learning
9	Include service learning experiences in class discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructor should always encourage students to discuss their service learning experiences in relation to the class discussion about readings, course materials, etc. Instructor can pose questions within the lecture or discussion about service learning to support students in drawing their own connections between their work in and out of class
10	Students should complete at least 10 hours; instructor follows-up on their work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructor requires students to turn in confirmation of at least 10 volunteer hours completed at the social service agency Instructor should follow-up on students' work individually via e-mail, in-class discussions, or informal write-ups to ensure that the students feel comfortable in their service learning settings and that they are completing their tasks
11	Students need to revisit the contract and make sure they are meeting their collaborative goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students should review their contract with their social service agency to confirm that they are striving toward their goals and demonstrating a healthy working relationship If students have already completed their goals or if the goals are too ambitious, then the student and social service agency representative should take the opportunity to redraft the contract Update the instructor if the contract is revised in any way
12	Include service learning experiences in class discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructor should always encourage students to discuss their service learning experiences in relation to the class discussion about readings, course materials, etc. Instructor can pose questions within the lecture or discussion about service learning to support students in drawing their own connections between their work in and out of class
13	Include service learning experience in class discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructor should always encourage students to discuss their service learning experiences in relation to the class discussion about readings, course materials, etc. Instructor can pose questions within the lecture or discussion about service learning to support students in drawing their own connections between their work in and out of class
14	Students should complete 20 volunteer hours; instructor and students prepare for final reflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructor requires students to turn in confirmation of at least 20 volunteer hours completed at the agency Although the reflection component should be decided by the students and instructors in the second week of the course, the class as a whole should clarify how the reflection will work Students should also prepare to ask their social service agency representatives to come to the final class
15	Final reflections; invite social service agency representatives to come to class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students should reflect in the manner that is determined by the class, but an element of discussion is encouraged Social service agency representatives should also contribute to the reflection component Students and social service agency representatives can discuss how they would like to carry on their relationship in the future

Application

Using my service learning experience in my Jewish-American Literature course I will provide an example for the possible application of this template. I have also noted when one of the previously defined template components is included in a given week.

Week One On the first day of class, the instructor should go through the syllabus to ensure that students understand the expectations for the course, including the sections on service learning. Some students do not have the time to commit 20 extra hours outside of class to do the service learning component. Make sure that this piece is clearly understood, because some students may choose to drop out of the course if they do not have time. Also, keep in mind that some instructors for service learning courses choose to host class for two 50 minute sessions a week instead of the usual 75 minute courses. This allows students to use the leftover 50 minutes to complete the service-learning project. If time is a deterrent, than this provides more students with the opportunity to take the course.

Before students leave for the day, remind them that they will need to decipher how they would like service learning to work in their class.¹ This is a group-defined project, so they should come with ideas next week on how Jewish-American Literature can be applied at a non-profit agency like KU Audio-Reader. Ask them to reflect on the similarities between the two and to consider how the service learning assignments should work in the course.

¹ Template Component 3

Week Two Begin class with a discussion on service learning.² As mentioned previously, service learning is not an easily defined term and there is purposefully an element of choice in application. Each class needs to decide how service learning will work in their particular class. In this scenario, the instructor had already chosen that every student would work with KU Audio-Reader. However, some courses may allow students to each pick where they would like to complete their service-learning project and if they would like to complete their projects as groups or individuals.

Instructors should also host a discussion where students are able to decipher how they would like their service learning assignments to work. There are possibilities for written or oral reflection, as well as projects or presentations. The opportunities are endless for the application of service learning in the classroom. Although students did not define the application in our class, we completed a written reflection, but we also had a discussion about service learning at the end of the semester. It was apparent to us during our first couple weeks of the course that we would invite representatives from KU Audio-Reader to speak with us during our last session.³

Finally, it is important that students start to make their own connections between service learning and the course material. For some, this might be problematic, particularly in an English course such as Jewish-American literature. Decide as a group with students and the instructor which avenue

² Template Component 2

³ Template Component 6

makes the connection clear for most students. Yet, also allow students to make their own connections on an individual basis. In my course, we had to present on a topic of our choosing during the semester. One connection that I was personally drawn to is between Jewish-American and social justice literature. Although I had the opportunity to construct a presentation on this topic, service learning did not need to be included, so most students did not mention their work at KU Audio-Reader in their presentations. Forcing students to include aspects of service learning in their presentations would have been a good opportunity to hear from our diverse perspectives, so it is something to consider for future courses. Whatever the students decide, however they see service learning working, then allow them the opportunity to do so.⁴

Week Three After deciding which social service agency students will work with, the students and instructor need to clarify what that relationship should look like.⁵ Will the students, instructor, or social service agency representatives plan the project? Will students volunteer or complete a project outside of the social service agency to benefit them? Can students work in groups or individually? Once these questions are answered, then students should have a better idea on what they can implement as a service-learning project.

As is previously mentioned, I think my service learning group could have better implemented a project to support KU Audio-Reader. Upon reading this section of my thesis, my advisor and Jewish-American literature professor explained to me that I was ignoring the

work that prior classes had done at KU Audio-Reader. After reflecting with her, I discovered that the previous Outreach group did complete community meetings to obtain more listenership, which was something I thought my group should have done, but they failed to send out press releases, which is something we successfully completed. In hindsight, our press releases may have been a beneficial project for KU Audio-Reader, but this issue of misunderstanding exemplifies the importance of having an open discussion between the community organization, faculty, and student. Although my fellow students were aware that a previous course had worked with KU Audio-Reader, to what end we did not know. These points of clarification are vital to successful service learning partnerships and to continuing those partnerships across various courses and students. Clarify these relationships as early as possible.⁶

Once the relationship is clarified, the students and/or instructor need to contact the social service agency that they intend to work with. They need to clarify with the agency that someone at the agency feels comfortable with the relationship and commitment of a service learning partnership. During this conversation, students and representatives need to set up a time to meet one-on-one to decide what their relationship will look like. In the Jewish American-Literature course, my instructor already set up a relationship with KU Audio-Reader and we took a class period to meet at the agency to discuss our relationship and projects.

Week Four After students have taken the first few weeks to decide what service learning means in their classroom, it is

⁴ Template Component 3

⁵ Template Component 3

⁶ Template Component 5

important that the instructor invites a speaker from the Center for Service Learning to inform the students on how to receive service learning certification. Although I have watched these presentations on service learning certification a plethora of times, it always feels rushed and disconnected from the course material. It is best to invite a speaker after students have had the chance to reflect on the idea of service learning so they can ask any questions when the speaker comes into the classroom. Also, instructors should reiterate the benefits of receiving service learning certification, so students are more apt to consider it. Instructors are also encouraged to explain how they benefit from instructing a service learning course. The instructor and student alike can invite the Center for Service Learning representative to visit on the last day of class for reflection.⁷

Week Five During the one-on-one meetings, students need to draft a contract with their social service agency representative.⁸ Contracts should include goals, tasks, due dates, and opportunities for the student in working with the agency. The contract needs to be signed by the student, instructor, and representative to ensure that it is implemented. Although our instructor required a contract, students should also be encouraged to revisit the contract to confirm that they are working toward their goals throughout the semester. The contract provides the framework for the representative and student to have an open discussion about service learning.

During this meeting, students should also clarify the mission and

purpose of the organization.⁹ It is best to facilitate a discussion with an organization representative to decipher his or her perspective on the organization and on the larger social issues or problems that the organization is attempting to alleviate. Students are encouraged to consider their own understanding of the organization and how it could better address the larger social issues.

Week Six, Nine, Twelve, Thirteen

Instructors should continually pose questions during class discussions that will encourage students to draw connections between their work at service agencies and their classroom materials.¹⁰ For example, how does culture apply to your work at KU Audio-Reader? How does this novel support your understanding of service learning? What information can you draw from the context of this novel that could also apply to KU Audio-Reader? The instructor does not need to have a specific answer in mind when asking these questions. In fact, it is best for the answers of these questions to both support the instructor's understanding as well as the fellow students' understanding.

Week Seven The instructor should incorporate service learning into the midterm assignment. We did not have a midterm assignment in my course, but throughout the semester, my instructor required us to turn in reflection papers on readings. Each of our papers also had to include a piece on our service-learning project, which forced us to draw connections between our work inside and outside of the classroom.

Week Eight The instructor should start a discussion based on the information he or

⁷ Template Component 6

⁸ Template Component 7

⁹ Template Component 1

¹⁰ Template Component 2

she received about service learning from the midterm assignment. All students should contribute and evaluate how the relationship is going so far.¹¹ If an instructor so chooses, he or she can also distribute evaluation forms in order to decipher how students are feeling about their service learning partnerships.

The intention of this discussion is to show that different students have different understandings of service learning and different experiences with their social service agency. Students are all able to learn from each other as they each discuss their experiences so far. Also, other students might be able to incorporate similar activities and understandings into their own agency. Although similar discussions should be held throughout the semester, it is important to have a setting in the middle of the course where students understand that service learning is the central fixture in the conversation. This will encourage them to reflect after having more experience at their organization.¹²

Week Ten Instructors should check in to confirm that students are completing the appropriate amount of hours to be on track, as well as to make sure that students feel comfortable in their service learning setting. It is up to the instructor and students on how this is implemented.

Week Eleven Students should review their contracts with their social service agency representatives to decipher if they are reaching their intended goals or not.¹³ At this point, students are able to make additions or subtractions if the goals are unattainable or already achieved. If the students and representatives choose to revise the contract, then they will need to

send a new copy to the instructor. In my course, we did not revisit our contract but many of our goals were changed. It is vital that students and the organization be held accountable by updating their contract.

Week Fourteen Instructors should require students to turn in a confirmation of their 20 hours signed by the social service agency representative. During the second to last week, the instructor should reiterate what the final reflection component will be, which was decided in the second week of the course. Again, this can be a presentation, discussion, or written piece. Students should also ask their social service agency representative to join in the last day of class.¹⁴ Considering that this is a partnership, it is important to hear from their point of view as well.

For example, in my Jewish-American Literature course, we invited representatives from KU Audio-Reader. We completed our projects in groups, so each group stood up and presented on the final product. Then our fellow students, representatives, and instructors provided us with feedback on our project.

Week Fifteen The instructor and students should conduct the reflection. It is best to include the opportunity for discussion no matter what type of reflection is incorporated. Students may want to take another service learning class in the future or instructors may want to continue the partnership with the organization, so there should be a discussion on how to continue the service learning relationship in the future.¹⁵ This was a particular issue with my course, because my fellow students and myself did not have an understanding of what

¹¹ Template Component 4

¹² Template Component 2

¹³ Template Component 7

¹⁴ Template Component 6

¹⁵ Template Component 5

the previous course had completed. Therefore, clarifying these ideas is vital to the continuous success of the relationship. Also, having these concrete ideas will encourage students to continue their work beyond the class itself.

CONCLUSION

After reflecting on my interviews and discussions with service learning constituents, there are four primary conclusions that could most positively impact the current methods for implementing service learning courses: (1) students need to be included in deciphering the form and content of their service learning experience. This allows them to have more invested in their service learning projects and encourages them to fully engage with their work in and outside of the classroom; (2) teachers must provide multiple experiences of reflection throughout the semester in order to provide students and the instructor with opportunities to revise their current project and understanding of their service learning relationship; (3) it is important for service learning to be integrated more holistically into the class structure. There should not be designated service learning days, but rather service learning should be consistently questioned and discussed in the classroom; (4) students must understand the mission, purpose, and goals of the organization they work with. If these changes are implemented in service learning courses then students, instructors, and the social service agency will benefit. These create a more positive working relationship, and they enable students to have a larger impact on the organization and the course itself. Most importantly, these methods encourage students, instructors, and social service agency representatives to critically evaluate the organization, the teachings in

the classroom, and the role of an active citizen.

Although my thesis is arriving at its end, my work with service learning is not. I have received an Undergraduate Research Award that will enable me to continue my work into next semester, so I can expand my understanding of service learning at the University of Kansas. It is my intention to interview more constituents and to incorporate a feedback loop on the template that I have created in order to construct the most useful aid for the implementation of service learning in the classroom. Service learning has enabled me to build strong connections in the community, practice classroom skills in real-world contexts, and strengthen my ability to reflect on my work. I aspire to continue the growth of service learning at KU so more students can share the worthy experiences that I have had. This is not only necessary for the world of academia, but for the purposes of graduating a class of informed, concerned, and actively engaged students with the skills to address and reflect on the social ills of their community.

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