

advanced visual journalism J446

Why Service-Learning?

“Experience enhances understanding; understanding leads to more effective action.”

From **WWU’s Center for Service-Learning** / <http://www.wvu.edu/depts/csl/>

The Community Classroom

Through service-learning courses the community becomes a dynamic classroom where learning is integrated with real world experience. The community classroom becomes a laboratory for challenging assumptions and moving students beyond analysis and observation to practice. Service-learning students gain professional skills and networking opportunities by being placed in off-campus worksites. Our community partners receive the benefit of assistance and students gain awareness of their community, local concerns, and various ways they can make a difference.

From **Learn and Serve, America’s National Service-Learning Clearing House** <http://www.servicelearning.org/>

Authentic service-learning experiences, while almost endlessly diverse, have some common characteristics (taken mostly from Eyler & Giles, *Where's the Learning in Service-Learning?*):

Service Learning is:

- They are positive, meaningful and real to the participants.
- They involve cooperative rather than competitive experiences and thus promote skills associated with teamwork and community involvement and citizenship.
- They address complex problems in complex settings rather than simplified problems in isolation.
- They offer opportunities to engage in problem solving by requiring participants to gain knowledge of the specific context of their service-learning activity and community challenges, rather than only to draw upon generalized or abstract knowledge such as might come from a textbook. As a result, service-learning offers powerful opportunities to acquire the habits of critical thinking; i.e. the ability to identify the most important questions or issues within a real-world situation.
- They promote deeper learning because the results are immediate and uncontrived. There are no "right answers" in the back of the book. *They crystallize career goals and build resumes and portfolios.*
- As a consequence of this immediacy of experience, service-learning is more likely to be personally meaningful to participants and to generate emotional consequences, to challenge values as well as ideas, and hence to support social, emotional and cognitive learning and development.

Service-learning is not:

- An episodic volunteer program.
- An add-on to an existing school or college curriculum.
- One-sided, benefiting only students or only the community.

The distinctive element of service-learning is that it enhances the community through the service provided, but it also has powerful learning consequences for the students or others participating in providing a service. Service-learning is growing so rapidly because we can see it is having a powerful impact on students and their development. It is a dynamic process, through which students' personal and social growth is tightly interwoven into their academic and cognitive development. According to scholars Eyler and Giles, with the service-learning model "experience enhances understanding; understanding leads to more effective action."