

Student Reflection and Service-Learning

“Service-learning” is designed to generate learning through the process of reflection on an experience. This type of learning is a supplement to conventional lectures or readings. The initial experience will be of a type that will inspire new feelings in the student, such as wonder, awe, guilt, outrage, confusion, unease, or bewilderment. This is often accomplished by placing students in situations that they would not normally find themselves in, such as tutoring in an underprivileged neighborhood, interacting with migrants or homeless persons, or working with juvenile hall inmates. By reflecting on the new feelings that arise during the experience, and on the experience itself, students are actually learning. Ideally, the service-learning process will continue beyond the experience-feeling-reflection stage and lead to the questioning of values, personal change, action, or commitment to creating a more just world. The first step is a meaningful reflection process.

We have identified three levels of reflection. Each level represents deeper exploration of the service-learning experience. An ideal reflection will encompass all three levels of reflection. Below are sample questions that correspond to each level as well as questions designed to transition to the next level of reflection.

First Level Experience Sample Questions

- What can you tell us about your experience?
- What was your project? What did you do there? Who was involved?
- Have you done something like this before?
- What did you like/ dislike about the experience? Can you tell us more about that?
- What were your expectations of the experience? How was it/ wasn't it like your expectations?
- How did the environment affect the way people acted?
- Would you have done anything differently?
- Who stood out for you in the group?
- How do you feel around the people you shared the experience with? Have your perceptions of the people changed since the experience?
- Would you recommend this placement/ experience to a friend?
- What advice would you give people in the future?

Second Level Experience Sample Questions

- How did this experience make you feel?
- Was your feeling unique in this experience?
- What adjective would you give to describe the experience?
- What metaphor would you give to describe the experience? Or for the feeling?
- What physical object would you select to help describe the experience? What does it represent to you?
- Can you give one positive and one negative image about your experience? Explain the reason behind your choices.
- What was the most comfortable aspect of this experience? Least comfortable?
- What similar settings lend themselves to this type of experience?
- Can the commonality of this experience lead to something else?
- How would others describe this experience?
- How does your experience compare with other's experiences?
- If given the chance, would you participate in this experience again? If not, why not?

Third Level Experience Sample Questions

Social Issues/ Economics/ Race/ Gender/ Age

- Why do you think economics made a difference in the situation?
- Did race make a difference? What about different life experiences?
- Were they male/ female?
- What is the immigration status? Were they with their family or on their own? Why?
- What cross-cultural issues do you perceive?

Ethics- Ought/ Should/ Right

- Let's think about the ethics involved in this?
- What is wrong with that?
- What justice issues are implicated?
- What about rights? Dignity?
- What are the consequences?
- What are the community values involved?

Self

- How does that relate to you?
- Do you have any ethical responsibilities?
- Is this something you should care about?
- What can you do about it?
- What choices are available to you related to this issue?
- What other questions do you need answers to/ about?
- What is the most important question to answer at this time for you?
- What sense do you make out of all of this?
- How great of an impact did these experiences have on you?
- How can you keep this experience alive?