

Title: "The ecological approach to service-learning in the composition classroom"

*Ecological - The science of the relationships between organisms and their environments
(www.thefreedictionary.com, 2010)*

Service-learning - Is a method that connects teaching and learning goals with community service, usually in the form of volunteering. Service-learning helps students participate within local communities—promoting civic engagement and responsibility—thus building important connections and a greater understanding of those communities' diverse needs. The educational component of service-learning comes in the form of having students reflect on their experiences.

Composition/Composing – Is the construction of meaning and the making of knowledge within a discourse community.

By: Adam Webb

University of Texas at El Paso

Content: This research presents quantitative data from two first-year composition courses where the freshmen students engaged in service-learning projects. During the course of the 2010 spring semester, 50 freshmen students in two separate composition courses were required to read and discuss four articles on service-learning, community service and volunteering. In lieu of these four articles and reading responses, students were also required to volunteer at a local non-profit organization.

Survey data from the service-learning project, Spring 2010

Survey Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
The Center for Civic Engagement representatives were helpful in introducing the local non-profit organizations and answering any questions I had.	23.3%	46.7%	30%	0%	0%	
The three articles I read on service-learning in class were useful in helping me better understand “service-learning” is.	43.3%	50%	3.3%	0%	3.3%	
My non-profit organization was useful in my volunteering experience.	10%	46.7%	36.7%	6.7%	0%	
My composition instructor’s input was beneficial to the outcome of the entire service-learning project.	16.7%	40%	13.3%	20%	0%	
My composition instructor’s input was beneficial to the outcome of the entire service-learning project.	53.3%	33.3%	6.7%	0%	6.7%	
This composition class has provided me with the opportunity to look at writing and researching from another perspective.	46.7%	40%	10%	0%	3.3%	
I plan to continue volunteering, if not at this non-profit organization, perhaps at another one.	27.6%	31%	31%	6.9%	3.4%	
Letter Grade	A	B	C	D	F	Unknown
Please circle which letter grade you think you have earned.	60%	26.7%	3.3%	0%	0%	10%

The survey was conducted at the end of the 2010 spring semester. Thirty out of fifty students in two separate first-year writing courses (composition courses) responded. The survey was administered through SurveyMonkey.com.

The structure of the composition course:

- Start with primary research strategies and methods (i.e. students conduct a series of three interviews of individuals within their majors, future careers, etc., writing a reflection on each one of the interviews and then a final reflection that synthesizes all three together in one document)
- Move into service-learning discussions and reading responses on the four articles (class time for writing responses and discussion)
- During the reading responses, students sign up with The Center for Civic Engagement (CCE) or locate their own non-profit organizations within the community and start volunteering
- For students who cannot volunteer (i.e. working, family commitments, and other reasons), introduce the alternative assignment
- Students start writing their reflections over their volunteering experiences, connecting it to the articles we read in class
- The semester ends with semi-formal debates between groups of students over these three areas: service-learning, community service, and volunteering

Composition 1311 assignment description: Service-learning project

This project is worth 25% of your overall grade

Due on: April 18, 2010 by 3:00 pm (submitted to student PBWorks' wiki pages as a MS Word document or as a link)

This service-learning project will require you to volunteer at a local non-profit organization in El Paso, Texas. The Center for Civic Engagement (CCE) located here on the University of Texas at El Paso's campus will provide you with local non-profit organizations. Representatives from this program (CCE) will be visiting our classroom and explaining what the CCE is and what types of volunteering opportunities are out there in the community. However, you may also locate your local non-profit organizations. This project will involve 4 phases. These 4 phases are listed below:

- **300-500 word reading responses** to the four articles we will be reading in class that includes: 1) summarizing the main points and ideas in the articles, 2) analyzing concepts from the articles, 3) interpreting the information from the articles, and 4) adding your personal opinions about the information and knowledge conveyed in the articles (offering honest and constructive criticism on the ideas and concepts they present); the four articles are located below (four articles = four separate reading responses)
- **300-600 word background and history** of your chosen local non-profit organization (i.e. from the non-profit organization's website or from the literature they have produced)
- **400-600 word semi-formal interview(s)** with 1 or 2 individuals associated with the local non-profit organization
- **500-900 word reflection** on your learning and volunteering experiences

The four service-learning articles we will be reading in class **from February 26-March 5, 2010**, are listed below and accessible through my PBWork's wiki site:

Adler-Kassner, L. (2000). Service-Learning at a Glance. *COLLEGE CYBERBRIEF* (newsletter). Reprinted with permission of the *National Council of Teachers of English*. Retrieved online as a PDF file on 10 October 2009. <<http://reflections.syr.edu/featured/KassnerLinda.pdf>>.

Butin, D. W. (2005). Service-learning is dangerous. *National Teaching & Learning Forum* 14(4), <<http://www.ntlf.com/>>, pp. 1-5.

Herzberg, B. (1994). Community service and critical thinking. *College Composition and Communication*, 45(3), 307-19.

Sigmon, R. (1979). Service-Learning: Three Principles. *Synergist* (9)1, 9-11.

Composition 1311 grading rubric: Service-learning project

This project is worth 25% of your overall grade

Due on: April 18, 2010 by 3:00 pm (submitted to student PBWorks' wiki pages as a MS Word document or as a link)

This service-learning project will require you to volunteer at a local non-profit organization in El Paso, Texas. The Center for Civic Engagement (CCE) located here on the University of Texas at El Paso's campus will provide you with local non-profit organizations. Representatives from this program (CCE) will be visiting our classroom and explaining what the CCE is and what types of volunteering opportunities are out there in the community. Or if you choose not to go through CCE, you may locate your own local non-profit organizations to volunteer at (please check with the instructor).

NAME(s): _____

Grading Scale

11 check marks = 98: A, 10-7 check marks = 89: B, 6 check marks = 79: C, 5-4 check marks = 69: D; 3-0 check marks = F.

The document, APA style (i.e. electronically uploaded MS Word essay to PB Works' wiki pages, website, etc.)

- All phases of the service-learning project were completed on time/due date (April 18, 2010): _____
- 12 point font, Times New Roman, 1 inch page margins (only for MS Word documents, otherwise be consistent in your fonts and size if posted directly onto your PBWorks wiki page): _____
- All of the reading responses, the background information on the local non-profit organization, semi-formal interviews, and final reflection over your learning and volunteering experiences were well-organized and logically constructed (this pertains to ALL of the writing): _____
- Written responses to the four articles, 300-500 words for each reading response (a short summary and some in-depth reflection on the four readings, offering honest and constructive criticism on them, using direct quotes or paraphrased passages from the articles): _____
- Well-researched material and cited sources (i.e. background information and history of the local non-profit organization, this should be 300-600 words): _____
- 1-2 semi-formal interviews with individuals associated with the local non-profit organization, 400-600 words for each one (including well developed questions and responses and reflections to the interviewee's responses): _____
- Final reflection over learning and volunteering experiences, 500-900 words: _____
- Some kind of proof that you volunteered at the local non-profit organization (i.e. written document/form from the non-profit, such as a signed waiver): _____
- Few grammar mistakes (i.e. punctuation, misspelled words, etc.): _____
- Pictures/images/graphs (if used) well-placed and cited within the document: _____
- References listed: _____

Total: _____

Alternative Research and Writing Assignment

Project: Why Students and People Do Not Volunteer

Purpose: To collect information/data on why students and individuals in general do not volunteer within local communities

Goal: To gain a better understanding why students and people in general do not volunteer, what reasons they give for not volunteering

Objective: To conduct a survey (i.e. using surveymonkey.com), interviews, and to employ the use other sources of information dealing with why students and individuals in general do not volunteer within local communities, analyzing all of the data and sources (i.e. using MS Excel to create charts or graphs of the data), then creating a document, 600-1,000 words

Assignment Description: The hypothesis you are being presented with is this: *Students and individuals in general usually do not volunteer within local communities because they are too busy working, have a family to take care of, or are unaware of where or how to volunteer.* While we may have some assumptions about this hypothesis, the assumptions are not necessarily true for everyone. Therefore, we need to do research to find out the reasons why students and individuals in general do not volunteer within local communities.

This assignment will entail you collecting primary research data (i.e. from your online survey and possibly interviewing a few individuals on why they do not or cannot volunteer. Remember, people volunteer, so when you develop the statements/questions for survey, please also ask if they do or have volunteered in the past (or are volunteering currently). You may also ask the reasons why they volunteer (i.e. school, work, sports, church, etc.). You may also use any information you find using the Internet, magazines, the articles we have read in class, or in books (as long as they are respectable/credible sources).

Once you have collected your data from the survey and interviews (if you choose to do interviews), you will write your interpretation of the data/findings into an essay, following APA conventions. For APA conventions please see here: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>.

Grading Rubric:

40% = Development of survey and questions/statements (to build your survey, you may use the Likert Model Scale located here as an example = http://www.southalabama.edu/coe/bset/johnson/lectures/lec6_files/image004.jpg)

10% = Use of other sources, such as interviews or information off of the Internet or texts from the in-class readings (i.e. direct quotes or paraphrased passages from the articles we read in class)

20% = Keeping the instructor informed of any progress or challenges on the assignment, this can be done through email, questions asked in class, or by letting the instructor read over drafts or survey findings

30% = The final document will: **1)** Interpret and analyze the data collected from the survey, **2)** attempt to answer the research hypothesis mentioned above through the interpretation and analyzation of the data as well as through the use of other sources such as the in-class readings, and **3)** provide some insight into why students and individuals in general do no volunteer within local communities

Total = 100%

References

- Adler-Kassner, L., Crooks, & Watters. (1997). Service-learning and composition at the crossroads. In L. Adler-Kassner, R. Cooks, & A. Watters (Eds.), *Writing the community: Concepts and models for service-learning in composition* (pp.1-17). Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education.
- Adler-Kassner, L. (2000). Service-Learning at a Glance. *COLLEGE CYBERBRIEF* (newsletter). Reprinted with permission of the *National Council of Teachers of English*. Retrieved online as a PDF file on 10 October 2009. <<http://reflections.syr.edu/featured/KassnerLinda.pdf>>.
- Anderson, J. B., Daikos, C., Granados-Greenberg, J., & Rutherford, A. (2009). The student coalition for strengthening communities: A Service-learning partnership between P-12 schools and a preservice teacher education program. In T. Kelshaw, F. Lazarus, J. Minier, & associates (Eds.), *Partnerships for service-learning: Impacts on communities and students*. (pp. 3-36). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Baca, I. & Muro, A. (2009). The hook-up: College writers and non-profits building relationships. In S. Garza (Ed.), *Service-Learning in the Composition Classroom (in publication)*, Southlake, Texas: Fountainhead X Press.
- Ball, K. & Goodburn, A. M. (2000). Composition studies and service learning: Appealing to communities? *Composition Studies*, 28(1), 79-93.
- Brownell, J. E. & Swaner, L. E. (2009). High-impact practices: Applying the learning outcomes literature to the development of successful campus programs. *Peer Review/Association of American Colleges and Universities*, spring, 26-30.
- Cavanagh, G. F. (1999). Spirituality for managers: Critique and context. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12(3), 186-99.
- Crews, R. J. (1999). Peace studies, pedagogy, and social change. In K. M. Weigert & R. J. Crews (Eds.), *Teaching for justice: Concepts and models for service-learning and peace studies* (pp. 23-32). Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education.
- Cushman, E. (2002). Sustainable service-learning programs. *College Composition and Communication*, 54(1) (2002): 40-65.
- Deans, T. (2000). *Writing partnerships: Service-learning in composition*. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Dicklitch, S. (2005). Human rights-human wrongs: Making political science real through service-learning. In D. W. Butin (Ed.), *Service-learning in higher education: Critical issues and directions* (pp. 127-38). New York: Palgrave.
- Dorman, W. & Dorman, S. F. (1997). Service-learning: Bridging the gap between the real world and the composition classroom. In L. Adler-Kassner, R. Cooks, & A. Watters (Eds.), *Writing the community: Concepts and models for service-learning in composition* (pp. 119-32). Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education.
- Dubinsky, J. M. (2001, March). *Service-learning and civic engagement: Bridging school and community through professional writing projects*. Meeting paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Warwick Writing Program, Department of English and Comparative Literacy Studies, University of Warwick. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED459462. Retrieved February 12 2009, from ERIC database.
- Gere, A. R. and Sinor, J. (1997). Composing service learning. *The Writing Instructor*, 16(2), 53-63.
- Guadarrama, I. (2000). The empowering role of service-learning in the preparation of teachers. In C. R. O'Grady (Ed.), *Integrating service-learning and multicultural education in colleges and universities* (pp. 227-43). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Heffner, G. G., & DeVries Beversluis, C. (Eds.). (2002). *Commitment and Connection: Service-Learning and Christian Higher Education*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Herzberg, B. (2000). Service learning and public discourse. In C. Glenn, M. A. Goldthwaite, & R. Connors (Eds.), *The St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing (5th ed.)* (pp. 462-73). Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Hutchinson, M. (2005). Living the rhetoric: Service learning and increased value of social responsibility. *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture*, 5(3), Duke University Press, 427-44.
- Kraft, R. J. (1996). Service-learning: An introduction to its theory, practice, and effects. *Education and Urban Society*, 28(2), 131-59.
- Martin, Jr., H. L. & Wheeler, T. A. (2000). Social justice, service-learning, and multiculturalism as inseparable

- companions. . In C. R. O'Grady (Eds.), *Integrating service-learning and multicultural education in colleges and universities* (pp. 135-51). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Mathieu, P. (2005). *Tactics of hope: The public turn in English composition*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Merrill, M. C. (1999). Learning about peace: Five ways service-learning can strengthen curriculum. In K. M. Weigert & R. J. Crews (Eds.), *Teaching for justice: Concepts and models for service-learning and peace studies* (pp. 125-35). Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education.
- Mikolchak, M. (2006). Service learning in English composition: A case study. *Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 6(2), 93-100.
- Milofsky, C., & Flack, Jr., W.F. (2005). Service learning as a source of identity change in Bucknell in Northern Ireland. In D. W. Butin (Ed.), *Service learning in higher education: Critical issues and directions* (pp. 157-71). NY: Palgrave.
- Morgan, W. & Streb, M. (2001). Building citizenship: How student voice in service-learning develops civic values. || *Social Science Quarterly*, 82(1), 154-169, doi: 10.1111/0038-4941.00014 <<http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/links/doi/10.1111/0038-4941.00014>>.
- Munter, J. H., Tinajero, J. V., Peregrion, S. & Reyes III, R. (2009). Project Action for equity: Service-learning with a gender equity focus on the U.S.-Mexico border. In T. Kelshaw, F. Lazarus, J. Minier, & associates (Eds.). *Partnerships for service-learning: Impacts on communities and students* (pp. 129-62). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Posey, S. M. & Quinn, D. (2009). Engaging humanities: Interdisciplinary approaches to composition and service-learning. *Journal for Civic Commitment*, 13(1), 1-14.
- Regan, A. E. & Zuern, J. D. (2004). Community-service learning and computer-mediated advanced composition: The going to class, getting online, and giving back project. *Computers and Composition* 17, 177-95.
- Rosenberger, C. (2000). Beyond empathy: Developing a critical consciousness through service-learning. In C. R. O'Grady (Ed.), *Integrating service-learning and multicultural education in colleges and universities*, (pp. 23-43). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc
- Sedlak, C. A., Doheny, M. O., Panthofer, N. & Anaya, E. (2003). Critical thinking in students' service-learning experiences. *College Teaching*, 51(3), 99-103.
- Sigmon, R. (1979). Service-Learning: Three Principles. *Synergist*(9)1, 9-11.
- Stanton, T. K., Giles, Jr., D. E., & Cruz, N. I. (1999). *Service-learning: A movements' pioneers reflect on its origins, practice, and future*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Tai-Seale, T. (2001). Liberating service learning and applying the new practice. *College Teaching*, 49(1), 14-18.
- Wade, R. C. (1997). Teachers for service-learning. In Ed. A. S. Waterman (Ed.), *Service-learning: Applications from the research* (pp. 77-93). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Weigert, K. M. (1999). Moral dimensions of peace studies: A case for service-learning. In K. M. Weigert & R. J. Crews (Eds.), *Teaching for justice: Concepts and models for service-learning and peace studies* (pp. 9-21). Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education.
- Youniss, J. & McLellan, J. A. (1999). Catholic schools in perspective: Religious identity, achievement, and citizenship. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 105-13.
- Zieren, G. R. & Stoddard, P. H. (2004). The historical origins of service-learning in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: The transplanted and indigenous traditions. In B. W. Speck & S. L. Hoppe. *Service-learning: History, theory, and issues* (pp.23-42). Westport, Connecticut: Praegar.

Contact Information:

Adam Webb adamwebb11@gmail.com University of Texas at El Paso