

## Teaching Through Reaching: Service Learning at Kennesaw State University

Nancy A. Prochaska, Assistant Professor, Management and Entrepreneurship,  
Kennesaw State University

An ancient Chinese proverb states, "*What I hear, I forget; what I see, I remember; what I do I understand.*"

University professors have long understood the value of experience in learning and have used varied techniques in teaching to enhance understanding. Traditionally, experiential learning comes in many forms, including internships, co-ops, consulting, and various group work situations, generally in the for-profit sector. Service Learning is a new form of experiential learning which is sweeping the country and which operates exclusively in the not-for-profit realm.

Service Learning connects theory with practice and is often cited as "linking learning to life." It uses meaningful and thoughtfully organized experience to reinforce the academic objectives of the course. Service Learning involves higher-level activities such as analysis, decision-making, and problem solving. It is not volunteerism, though that too can have important benefit to college students. Rather, it builds academic knowledge and skills, including leadership skills, while meeting community needs and/or promoting the public. Service Learning builds connections between students, their communities, and the world outside the classroom. It enhances citizenship and encourages ethics development. It bolsters communities; it also builds resumes. Everyone wins.

Service Learning can be implemented in as many ways as there are college courses. It is limited only by the amount of imagination invested into the design of a class; community needs are everywhere. History, Literature, Chemistry, and Theater courses all can use Service Learning. While Nursing, Sociology, and Management might have obvious applications for Service Learning, Music, Physical Education, and Art can also have academic objectives reinforced through community projects. The American Association for Higher Education has published a series of volumes on Service Learning in the disciplines. Ten volumes are currently available with eight more scheduled for publication in the near future.

Kennesaw State University has a long-standing commitment to public service, addressing the needs and improving the quality of life in the community. This commitment coupled with the central institutional priorities of effective teaching and learning make Service Learning at KSU a natural "marriage." Kennesaw State University is embracing this innovative approach to teaching through a new group called the Alliance for Community Engagement. Its members, comprised of dedicated faculty coupled with faculty mentors seasoned

in Service Learning, have embarked upon a journey of professional development and servant leadership. Faculty report freshness in their classes as students mesh together new projects and theories.

The proposed projects are exciting and varied. As an example, a junior level history class will carefully develop a series of questions about the Great Depression and World War II. These questions will be used to gather oral histories from people living in Assisted Living Communities, who often have few interested listeners. Then this information will be compared and contrasted to books and movies about the era.

A senior communications class studying the uses and effects of Mass Media will take their lessons to the streets, teaching groups of pre-teens, ages 6-12, about the tricks of advertisers and the illusion of special effects. This pre-teen group is especially vulnerable to deceptive media and alluring messages.

A senior retailing class will complete a merchandising analysis for not-for-profit thrift shops. Students will study inventory control, pricing, displays, layout and design. The students learn through hands-on experience; the thrift stores gain some good insights; and the community wins.

The long-term plan at Kennesaw State University expands these Service Learning experiences, weaving them through the university adventure. Both a volunteering opportunity at the Freshman level and a discipline specific Senior Seminar culminating the major coursework will be added. These two bookend courses, along with other courses that integrate Service Learning, will give our students a rich education. As a result of their service activities, students should have developed commitment to community engagement. For if the ancient Chinese saga was correct, "*the doing*" will lead to "*the understanding*."