

## Service/Experiential Learning: A GIFT that Fosters Signature Work

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### What is Service/Experiential Learning?

“[F]ield-based ‘experiential learning’ with community partners is an instructional strategy – and often a required part of the course. The idea is to give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element in these programs is the opportunity students have to both *apply* what they are learning in real-world settings and *reflect* in a classroom setting on their service experiences. These programs model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life” (Kuh, 2008, p. 11).

### What makes it a Great Idea For Teaching?

The AAC&U has identified service-learning/experiential learning as one of ten “High-Impact Educational Practices,” practices that “have been widely tested and have been shown to be beneficial for college students from many backgrounds” (Kuh, 2008, p. 9). Benefits of service-learning experiences include:

- increases the likelihood that students will experience diversity through contact with people who are different from themselves
- provides opportunities for students to see how what they are learning works in different settings, on and off campus
- increases academic engagement
- can be life changing (Kuh, 2008, pp. 15-17)

### How does it connect with the idea of Signature Work (SW)?

The AAC&U’s LEAP Challenge literature specifically identifies community-based, experiential learning as a fruitful avenue for fostering SW. Service-learning experiences during the college years push students to engage directly with the messiness of the “real world,” and think creatively about how ideas can be brought to bear in improving conditions in our communities. As the AAC&U describes, “A twenty-first century education prepares students to work with unscripted problems. Today’s graduates will...engage with diverse communities that urgently need solutions to intractable problems. Our graduates will have to secure environmental sustainability, find ways to maintain human dignity and equity in an increasingly polarized nation, and manage a world rife with conflict” (AAC&U, 2015). Service-learning provides an incubation ground within which students can begin to engage in this complex work.

### That’s great and all, but how can I realistically incorporate it into my class?

- Visit this page on Campus Compact’s website: <http://compact.org/resource-posts> . It provides a trove of examples/resources relating to how professors from all over the country and in all disciplines have incorporated service/experiential learning into their courses
- Get in touch with Keri Bass in CORE to discuss ideas and identify community partners that might be interested in working with you.
- Get in touch with Jeff Ratliff-Crain about funding support (for transportation, meals, etc.)

### References

- AAC&U. (2015). *The LEAP Challenge: Education for a world of unscripted problems*. Retrieved September 25, 2015 from <https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/LEAPChallengeBrochure.pdf>.
- Kuh, G.D. (2008). *High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

## **One Teacher's Stories: How Service-Learning Provided Scaffolding for Future Signature Work**

Course: LSFY 103-05: Urban (School) Legends? Examining Conditions in Inner City Schools

*Description of S-L Component:*

- Augie students serve 2 hours each week as tutors in an after-school program for students at Frances Willard Elementary School in Rock Island. Frances Willard serves a high poverty and ethnically diverse community. Most students are immigrants/refugees from Liberia, Burma, and Thailand.
- Augie students also engage in pen-pal (email-pal, actually) relationships with high school juniors at EPIC Academy, a charter high school in south Chicago. EPIC also serves a high poverty community. The racial make-up is nearly 50% African American and 50% Latino. In addition to weekly pen pal exchanges, the Augie students spend a full school day at EPIC Academy, and EPIC Academy juniors make an overnight visit to Augie.
- Augie students are required to write weekly journals that draw connections between course readings and insights they are gaining via their volunteer service and their pen-pal relationships. In addition, the final research paper requires students to identify a question or issue that is related to some urban school issue (such as immigration, school funding policies, race issues, curricular issues, health care issues, etc.), conduct a related literature review, and supplement their “book-based research” with community-based research (e.g., eliciting a pen-pal’s perspective, interviewing a school social worker, interviewing leaders in relevant community organizations, etc.).

*Evidence that the Course Provided Scaffolding for Future Signature Work*

- Exceptionally high scores on IDEA Item 32 (“Acquiring an interest in learning more by asking my own questions and seeking answers”), OKT, More Than I Imagined, Comprehensive Learning Portfolios, direct influence on choice of major (anthropology, psychology, education, pre-law, etc.), unsolicited student comments

Course: EDUC 262/263: Songs of Freedom: Music, Politics, and Education in Jamaica

*Description of S-L Component:*

- Required coursework for the Augie Jamaica Program, EDUC 262 is a 3-credit, on campus course that prepares students for the spring break trip, exposes them to aspects of Jamaican culture and history, and begins to raise pointed questions about colonialism, oppression, and social justice (in most cases, these issues are laid out by Jamaican voices via literature, music, and film).
- EDUC 263 is a 1-credit service-learning experience that occurs on the island. Students spend a week as full-time teachers and teacher aides in three inner-city Kingston schools.
- Upon returning to the U.S., students are required to complete two culminating projects: (1) an audio-visual documentary that communicates insights gained via the experience...relevant Jamaican music is a required component; (2) an essay that integrates ideas drawn from pre-trip readings/discussions/course material with insights gained from the trip itself with indications of what these ideas mean and what they might lead to in the future for each student

*Evidence that the Course Provided Scaffolding for Future Signature Work*

- Peace Corps, More Than I Imagined, testimonies about courage to pursue “alternative” post-grad opportunities, Comprehensive Learning Portfolios