



FAQ: Service learning at NKU

Q: What is service learning?

A: It is the use of a service opportunity with a community partner to enhance learning the classroom. A marketing class might learn to write a marketing plan, then as an applied learning exercise, write a real marketing plan for a local nonprofit. Or a history class might research a local history topic, and then adapt that research for a community museum exhibit. A biology class might learn field techniques for watershed analysis, and then apply that learning by teaching it to high school students during a summer camp. All three of those are real examples from NKU.

Q: Why include service learning in a class?

A: The most important reason is because it has the power to amplify what is being taught. In short, the best reason is to strengthen academic goals. If service learning will not help achieve learning outcomes for a course, then avoid it. There are other benefits, including direct benefits to the community partner. But first and foremost, service learning is an academic strategy. It is a proven pedagogy.

Q: Does NKU have a formal definition of service learning?

A: Yes, and the definition is a national model: “Service Learning is a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets a community need and (b) reflect upon their service activity as a means of gaining a deeper understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, an enhanced sense of civic responsibility, and/or a greater interest in and understanding of community life.”

Q: I have seen the “checklist” that helps a faculty member or chair determine whether a class meets NKU’s service learning criteria. Once this checklist is completed, do I need to return it to anyone?

A: No, it is simply a guide developed by an NKU academic committee to help you determine whether a class meets NKU’s guidelines. In the end, a faculty member in consultation with his or her chair decides whether the class is a service learning class under NKU’s criteria. You are welcome to contact the SHCCE for guidance, but it not required.

Q: What disciplines work for service learning?

A: All disciplines. There are some courses where traditional teaching methods – readings, lectures, labs, research and writing – might be the best tools. Very often service learning can enhance those. For example, service learning always includes a reflection component because we learn first by an activity, then learn more deeply by reflecting on it. The reflection can be a written assignment.

Q: Does service learning follow the course or the professor?

A: Either, though at NKU service learning most often follows the professor. Service learning is a way to teach, and just as one professor might use essay tests and another multiple choice, one professor might use service learning and another not. Because of these, sections at NKU are more likely to be designated “service learning” rather than courses. There are exceptions, with certain courses always containing a service learning component regardless of who is teaching the course.

Q: Should service learning classes be designated in myNKU?

A: Yes it should, and the designation can be done easily enough. If you have questions about how, contact NKU’s Center for Innovation & Technology in Education. Designating classes in myNKU allows students to see what service learning classes available. It also allows NKU to track and report service learning in the aggregate. This designation should be done by each department, as part of the normal process of entering courses into myNKU.

Q: What other reporting is in place for service learning at NKU?

A: Two simple self-report structures are in place. The first is myNKU, where you can designate a class as service learning in advance, so that students can identify service learning offerings and so the university can track the number of service learning courses at NKU. The second comes at the end of the academic year, when public engagement information is collected in Digital Measures. This system collects a wider array of information about your public engagement, but service learning is an aspect.

Q: What support is available for service learning at NKU?

A: The Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement (Founders Hall 536; 572-1448; engage@nku) offers several resources, including:

- **Resource room:** The Center has DIY guides, monographs, workbooks and scholarly works on service learning, which you are welcome to borrow. Some of the guides are discipline-specific.
- **Financial support:** Small grants for course development and course support are offered year-round, subject to budget availability. Typical grants are \$100 to \$1,000. Support also is available for conference presentations on service learning (example: covering the cost of conference registration).
- **Workshops:** The SHCCE conducts workshops each semester on service learning, bringing in national experts. Watch Midweek for announcements or contact the center.
- **Peer mentors:** About a dozen faculty members volunteer each year to be service learning mentors for peer-to-peer discussion of how to incorporate service learning into a class. The center can connect you with a mentor.
- **On the web:** Our site, civicengagement@nku.edu, includes a “for faculty” button that will take you to a service learning resource page.

Q: I’ve heard about student philanthropy classes at NKU. What exactly are those?

A: In these service learning classes, students must identify a community need, discover what regional nonprofit are meeting those needs and then assess which would best use a small grant, typically \$1,000 to \$2,000. NKU began these classes in the Fall 2000 semester and today offers 10 to 15 classes each academic year, across disciplines. If you are interested in teaching a class, contact the SHCCE.

Q: I want to try service learning but I’m not sure how to find a community partner.

A: Not a problem. Many nonprofits are anxious to partner with an NKU class. The SHCCE will work with you to find a partner or partners once we know the kind of applied learning engagement you envision. Simply contact the center.