

University: North Carolina State University

Program: Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning

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Description of Program:

- To whom is the strategy or initiative directed among first-year students?

The NC State Service-Learning Curricular Development Program (SL Program) serves students at all levels, including first-year students. The program helps interested faculty transform an existing course so as to include a service-learning component. In SL courses, students engage in community service that is carefully arranged to complement the course content, and they participate in individual and group reflection processes designed to enrich both their academic work and their service experience.

- Among these targeted students, how many or what percentage participate or benefit? If not all targeted students participate, how are participants selected?

The SL Program is now in its third year of operation and first year of steady funding. From a starting point in 1999-2000 of 2 SL courses enrolling 42 students, the program has grown this year to 15 courses enrolling an estimated 300 students. Student participation depends on faculty development, and at this stage in the SL Program a limited number of faculty have been interested in transforming first-year courses. One round of faculty training explicitly targeted instructors of first-year students, and 3-4 faculty teaching either in First Year College (FYC) or in the First Year Inquiry (FYI) program attended. SL courses involving first-year students in the past year include 3 FYI courses, one FYC course, and an Honors Seminar.

- What connections does the program or strategy have to formal classroom experiences and learning outcomes?

SL courses are “normal” courses that have been enhanced for service-learning. Therefore, they meet all standards for “formal classroom experiences.” In addition to traditional learning outcomes, SL courses explicitly seek students’ personal growth and development, commitment to participation in civic life, and enhanced mastery of academic material.

- What qualitative or quantitative assessment data are available to suggest effectiveness?

At this stage in its development, the SL Program is rapidly accumulating qualitative “data” in the form of such things as student reflection journals, group presentations, and testimonials of students, faculty, and community partners. More formal formative assessment tools are in development. Beyond this, the program relies at this point on the broader literature of 20 years’ work in service-learning.

- How long has the program strategy been practiced? How has it evolved?

Service-learning as an approach to teaching has an extended history, and the NC State program is built on that literature. The SL Program was started by a group of 2 faculty and 2 staff who successfully applied to University Extension for a small pilot grant. Based on preliminary evidence of progress, the Provost continued modest support for the second year. In the third year, with the program growing well and evidence for its benefits mounting, the Provost expanded funding and made it permanent, and the university joined Campus Compact. In addition, we have secured \$30,000 in grants thus far, and we are working on a number of other possibilities.

- Have others emulated the practice, or has it received formal recognition for effectiveness?

The most distinctive part of the NC State SL Program is its guided reflection. Advanced undergraduates are trained in leading discussion in a 3-hour course—“Reflective Learning Through Service”—offered through the Department of Political Science and Public Administration. Trained Reflection Leaders are then assigned to support one or more SL courses. They attend the courses, so they are in position to guide enrolled students through a carefully structured reflection process. The reflection process was developed by the lead SL developer (a member of the NC State faculty) and 3 undergraduate students. A leading national expert considers the reflection protocol to be one of the strongest in the nation, and those involved in its development have been asked by numerous other universities, colleges, and other educational institutions to give workshops on it.

- What is the source of funding? Is the funding sustainable?

Base funding is provided through the Office of the Provost. Current base funding is sustainable but insufficient for the program to meet its potential, and efforts to expand reliable annual funding are in progress. Outside grants now provide an additional \$30,000, and other proposals for external grants are in various stages of progress.