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Bridging the Gap: Using Service-Learning Teaching Assistants to Foster Effective University-Community Partnerships

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Bridging the Gap: Using Service-Learning Teaching Assistants to Foster Effective University-Community Partnerships

Abstract
The objectives of this presentation were to: (1) describe the VCU Service-Learning Teaching Assistant (SLTA) Program; (2) discuss the benefits of integrating defined student leadership into service-learning courses; and (3) share best practices and resources.

Keywords
service-learning, teaching assistant, university-community, partnerships, teaching, higher education

Disciplines
Higher Education

Comments
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Bridging the Gap
Using Service-Learning Teaching Assistants to Foster Effective University-Community Partnerships

Erin Burke Brown, M.P.A.
Lynn Pelco, PhD

VCU
Virginia Commonwealth University
Objectives

- Describe the VCU Service-Learning Teaching Assistant (SLTA) Program
- Discuss the benefits of integrating defined student leadership into service-learning courses
- Share best practices and resources
Service-Learning is great BUT....

Based on your experience, what are the pitfalls that prevent faculty, students, and the community from getting the most benefit out of service-learning?

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What is VCU’s SLTA Program?

- A program facilitated by the Service-Learning Office that trains faculty-nominated undergraduate and graduate students to assist with service-learning courses during the semester.
Student Program Requirements

- Nominated by faculty member
- Enrollment in online service-learning orientation
- Enrollment in monthly SLTA seminar taught by SL staff
- 5-hour weekly commitment to faculty member
- Successful completion of service-learning course*
Program Beneficiaries

- SLTAs
- Instructors
- Students
- Community Partners
- Service-Learning Staff

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SLTA Benefits

"Be the change you want to see in the world" - Ghandi

- Leadership skill development
- Professional mentoring
- Networking
- Problem solving/critical thinking skills
- Gain community experience
- Resume-building
- Honors credit
Instructor Benefits

"Work smarter not harder"

- Community partner liaison
- Student service tracking
- Assist with reflections (oral and written)
- Peer mentoring
- Enhance student relationships
“You will never be a leader unless you first learn to follow and be led.”

-Tiorio

- Peer mentoring/modeling
- Structure and organization
- Student voice
- Accessibility

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Community Benefits

“Without community service, we would not have a strong quality of life. It's important to the person who serves as well as the recipient. It's the way in which we ourselves grow and develop.”

-Dorothy Height

- Structure and organization
- Student connection
- Increased communication
- Sense of purpose
- Student accountability
Service-Learning Office Benefits

“"I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something."” - Helen Keller

- Increased knowledge of course content and service-learning application
- Troubleshooting
- Provide more support to stakeholders
- Spread the service-learning message
HONR 399: Service-Learning Orientation

- 1.5 credits
- Online (Blackboard)
- 7 weeks/7 modules
- Asynchronous
- Interactive Discussion board
- Mini-lectures
MODULE #1 -- Orientation to Online Learning
Complete this module first. Click on the underlined text to open the folder. Inside you will find folders for readings and assignments.

MODULE #2 -- Socio-Economic Class in America
Complete this module second. For this module, you will watch 4 videos and write a short (800-1000 word) reflection paper that relates to the videos. Click on the underlined text (i.e., the words "MODULE #2" above) to open the folder to find the videos and reflection paper assignment for this module.

MODULE #3 -- What is Service-Learning?
Complete this module third. Click on the underlined text (i.e., the words "MODULE #3" above) to open the folder.

MODULE #4 -- Working in Groups
Complete this module fourth. Click on the words "MODULE #4" above to open the folder and find the required reading.

Module #5 -- Working in the Community
Complete this module fifth.

MODULE #6 -- Reflection in Service-Learning
Complete this module sixth.

MODULE #7 -- Roles & Responsibilities of Service-Learning TAs
Complete this module last.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Module Number</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Assignments (due date)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Watch Module Introduction Video</td>
<td>1. Icebreaker Activity (posted before February 24th at 5:00 p.m.)</td>
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<td>2. Read Ch. 1 in Creswell et al</td>
<td>2. Online Readiness Assessment Reaction (posted before February 18th at 5:00 p.m.)</td>
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<td>3. Watch 2 short videos on self-learning at VCU</td>
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<td>4. Read Principles of Good Practice Handbook</td>
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<td>5. Practice finding a self-learning course at VCU</td>
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<td>1. Reflection paper (posted before February 24th at 5:00 p.m.)</td>
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<td>2. Complete Exercise 4.1 (posted before February 25th at 5:00 p.m.)</td>
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<td>3. Complete Group Paper Assignment (posted before February 25th at 5:00 p.m.)</td>
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<td>5. Complete Multiple Choice Quiz focused on Modules 3-6 (completed before March 24th at 5:00 p.m.)</td>
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<td>6. Complete Orientation Reflection Exercise (completed before March 15th at 5:00 p.m.)</td>
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<td>7. Read Ch. 7 in Creswell et al</td>
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<td>8. Review Roles and Responsibilities Table</td>
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<td>9. Read Module Introduction Video</td>
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<td>10. Complete Exercise 4.1 (completed before March 24th at 5:00 p.m.)</td>
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<td>11. Complete Group Paper Assignment (completed before March 24th at 5:00 p.m.)</td>
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<td>12. Complete Multiple Choice Quiz focused on Modules 4 &amp; 7 (completed before March 15th at 5:00 p.m.)</td>
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<td>13. Complete Orientation Reflection Exercise (completed before March 15th at 5:00 p.m.)</td>
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HONR 492: SLTA Seminar

- Monthly 2-hour meetings
  - Topics include leadership, diversity, and social justice
- Facilitated by SL staff
- Student development focus
- Reflection intensive
- 50% of grade based on online instructor assessment of student performance
Using Logic Models

PURPOSE or MISSION of your program, effort, or initiative

INPUTS or RESOURCES: raw materials used by the program
CONSTRAINTS or BARRIERS to program objectives

ACTIVITIES: what the program does with the resources to direct the course of change

OUTPUTS: direct evidence of having performed the activities

EFFECTS or results, consequences, outcomes, impacts of having taken action (intended and unintended):
- short-term
- mid-term
- longer-term

CONTEXT or CONDITIONS of your work