

PAUSE for Pedagogy

EXPANDING LEADERSHIP EDUCATION: TEACHING SERVICE-LEARNING ONLINE

Integration of leadership and service-learning in leadership focused courses is not a new concept. However, providing this combination of pedagogies in a completely online environment is relatively new. Providing such coursework online enables instruction to extend to anywhere in the world. The potential impact reaches beyond the classroom as students from diverse cultural, social, and economic backgrounds collectively investigate community development within the framework of leadership, civic engagement, social action, and making positive change. This article provides practical strategies in developing an online service-learning course, as well as successes and challenges from experience teaching such classes.

Contemporary higher education has a responsibility to prepare students to solve social problems on local and global levels; therefore, educators are challenged to develop a diverse context for learning and living (Hurtado, 2005). It is critical to educate students with respect to social issues in general and to address such issues within a leadership and community engagement context. Online service-learning courses, which use a fairly new combination of pedagogies, provide new opportunities for leadership and civic education. While service-learning pedagogy has been actively explored in the United States since the 1970's (Stanton, Giles & Cruz, 1999), facilitating this type of learning online is still relatively new. Examining the potential of service-learning and leadership pedagogies in a virtual environment helps educators to identify foundational best practices and technological tools. Even though service-learning is a pedagogy traditionally used in local communities and primarily an in-person endeavor, technology has expanded



Lisa Endersby dives into teaching service-learning online in this supplemental video interview with article author Kathy Guthrie.

the possibilities to include working in a global community. For example, virtual volunteering has provided a forum where community service can be completed in an online environment.

Educators often shy away from integrating leadership and service-learning pedagogies in a completely online environment due to the lack of educators' experience and scant research available on online service-learning courses. Since these types of courses are traditionally face-to-face, moving to a virtual space can be intimidating for leadership educators. Further, not fully understanding how course content will translate to a virtual space causes educators to be cautious in creating such opportunities.

In the past 10 years, I have developed and taught several online service-learning courses, including a course titled *Social Change and Leadership* that over 1,000 students situated around the world have completed. That course examines community engagement from a positive social action framework, exploring a range of leadership styles and students' capacities to enact broad change. Foundational leadership theories include the social change model of development (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996) and servant leadership (Greenleaf & Spears, 2002). As stated in curricular objectives, upon completion of this course, students are to have developed an

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understanding of service-learning theory through the recognition of various historical models of leadership in social change movements. These learning outcomes are realized through reflective teaching approaches that require students to consider the relationship between the individual and society within a contemporary societal context. In this course, students are required to identify strategies that promote social action, exploring the potential for local and global change through collaboration with communities, at service sites, and among learning peers. Achieving these objectives requires students to focus on community service projects where theories of social change and leadership can be experienced and examined.

Critical to online service-learning courses is the integration of service-learning, leadership, and experientially based learning situated in local communities. In combination, such methods can transform teaching and learning partnerships in ways that alter learning experiences and enrich individual awareness (Cranton, 2006). To effectively implement service-learning and leadership pedagogies online, instructors must consider the following:

1. Create virtual environments that enable ongoing communication, interaction, and relationship building. For example, require engagement through various discussion board posts, reflective blogging, or social media interaction between students, community staff, and faculty.
2. Develop a teaching approach that fosters autonomy and collaboration. For example, frame the course around individual service experiences and how making meaning of those experiences apply to the collective, especially in leading others in making positive change.
3. Design and implement methodologies that afford opportunities for critical reflection and inquiry. For example, provide multiple ways for students to reflect critically. Remembering that students might reflect differently, offering various avenues will promote critical inquiry, as well as reflection.
4. Deliver curricula through universally accessible technologies which support primary learning goals and the development of secondary skills (e.g., mastering website navigation and the use of software and hardware) (Guthrie & McCracken, 2010).

In the 10 years I have been developing, teaching, and assessing online service-learning courses, many successes and challenges have been identified. Major successes in developing these courses include fulfilling institutional missions, reaching and impacting national and global communities, and witnessing the evolution of individual change. Because online service-learning courses extend access to learning within a context of geographic, socio-cultural, and economic diversity, not only do students provide service in their own communities, but they also provide needed assistance around the world. Participation in these types of experiences and subsequent dialogues with peers enables a rich environment that promotes deep learning.

The biggest challenge in teaching online service-learning courses is developing and teaching curricula that utilizes highly interactive instructional approaches. The establishment of the virtual teaching and learning environment is itself challenging. It requires capturing and nurturing teachable moments that occur both during planned online activities as well as through spontaneous learning experiences encountered in face-to-face interactions at community service sites. The construction of such instructional experiences is particularly complex as they occur within virtual learning environments where students and instructors never come into physical contact with one another. As in most virtual communication, nonverbal body language and unspoken cues are difficult to discern. It is difficult for instructors to identify and understand the disparate skill sets among enrolled students — this impacts instructors' abilities to facilitate and assess learning in ways that are personally relevant to individual students.

Reviewing resources will assist educators in the development and implementation of online service-learning courses. [Minnesota Campus Compact's Center for Digital Civic Engagement](#) provides an excellent list of resources and connects educators doing this work. Additionally, articles such as "[E-Service Learning: The Evolution of Service-Learning to Engage a Growing Online Student Population](#)" (Waldner, Widener, & McGorry, 2012) provides a more in-depth look at research being done in this area.

About PAUSE for Pedagogy

PAUSE for Pedagogy aims to connect leadership education theory to practice and seeks to take lessons learned in the classroom to expand our theoretical knowledge of teaching and learning. Written for both the experienced educator and those new to the profession, this column will add tools to readers' pedagogical toolboxes. Each column is accompanied by a video interview with the author exploring the ideas raised in the article in more detail. The series is edited by Lisa Endersby and Dan Jenkins, members of ILA's Leadership Education Member Interest Group. Have you implemented an innovative practice in your leadership education? Contact Dan and Lisa at pauseforpedagogy@ila-net.com.

Online service-learning expands leadership education to create supportive and challenging virtual classrooms for students to learn how to lead and create positive change. I encourage educators to embrace the complexity of using these pedagogies to make leadership learning more easily available for all.

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