Service Learning Design Team Report and Recommendations December 2011

What is service learning?

Service learning is a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs. These structured opportunities are combined with reflection and reciprocity to promote student learning and development. An important component of service learning is the requirement that students share their learning with the client, the community and fellow students.

The benefits of service learning

Service learning promotes student responsibility, builds relationships between the college, the students and the community, and meets the needs of both the student and the community. By completing a planned learning experience, the student is provided with an opportunity to practically apply the lessons learned in the classroom. Equally significantly, service learning is a unique educational experience: each student completes the service learning activity by reflecting on their experiences, in the classroom, with their fellow students. Students serve the community and then learn from each other by reflecting on that service. By meeting community needs in a way that does not cost the College or the community, service learning promotes civic responsibility.

- The community benefits because our students meet a human need.
- The student benefits by networking with area professionals while learning transferable skills through a short-term practical experience. Students develop character, self-respect and an understanding of the value of service.
- The College benefits from stronger completion and retention rates and an increased opportunity to develop innovative curricular experiences while fulfilling the service mission of the College.

Recommendations

The Service Learning Design Team believes that there are unmet student learning needs and opportunities within the community we serve and among our students and faculty. To meet those needs, we make the following recommendations.

 The College should develop a comprehensive and organized Service Learning program. We recommend, as a first step in developing such a program, that a community demand survey be completed. Such a survey of community leaders

- and organizations will gauge community demand and the degree to which the community is open to hosting service learning projects.
- At this point, the state of service learning at the College might be described as sporadic. Individual faculty and student groups create opportunities but there is no central clearinghouse for information and there is a lack of leadership. That void should be filled. Faculty must be made aware of the opportunities for us to learn within the community through short-term service. All members of the community must know that there are people at this community college who are willing to inform, suggest and lead.
- Tools must be created for the community, the students and the faculty. A fundamental, first tool is a thorough inventory of current service learning projects. This inventory will serve as a model for faculty developing new service learning opportunities. In addition, a collection of service learning case studies currently underway or completed at other colleges and universities should be developed. The best practices of colleagues at other institutions may be adapted by our students and faculty to serve our own community.
- Other tools that are required includes definitions, guidelines, examples of
 expected reflection (discussion paper, journal, portfolio, or oral presentation), an
 on-line presence, sample time logs and tracking devices, a faculty manual,
 student manual, community manual, types of community organizations served,
 and a brochure including student testimonials.
- Current and future service learning projects should be consistently noted in the co-curricular transcript (currently referred to as the Student Development Record or SDR). The faculty must be made aware of the co-curricular transcript and should be informed as to the policies and practices governing the inclusion of student accomplishments in the co-curricular transcript. In order to maintain a consistent approach when recording student service learning accomplishments, it will be necessary for a group of faculty and staff to be made responsible for the approval of Service Learning Projects recorded on the co-curricular transcript. It is recommended that this group receive proposals and make recommendations to approve/decline co-curricular transcript notations to the Vice President for Learning and Academic Affairs. The Vice President would make the final decision.
- When approving a service learning project for the co-curricular transcript, the number of required hours, types of service, and the logistics of recording service learning projects must all be considered.
- The design team wishes to record several service learning options. Any or all of these might be recorded in the co-curricular transcript. These include a service learning course, the addition of 1 credit to a 3-credit course with the addition of a

service learning option, service learning projects completed in lieu of papers or presentations, a service learning certificate, a service learning designation added to courses in which service learning was completed, and service learning projects completed through student professional clubs (and then incorporated into appropriate courses for reflection and reciprocity). The design team strongly recommends that faculty who are interested in incorporating service learning opportunities into their courses be provided maximum flexibility in exploring how service learning could be used to improve the educational experience.

- In order for service learning to thrive at Mohawk Valley, we recommend that a standing committee responsible for service learning be created. We recommend that the Service Learning Liaison be the chairperson of the service learning committee. The committee should report to the Vice President for Learning and Academic Affairs. The group's charge should include:
 - Develop guidelines and policies for approval of service learning projects.
 - Make recommendations for approval/disapproval of service learning to the Vice President for Learning and Academic Affairs. Successful projects will be recorded in the co-curricular transcript.
 - Educate the college community about service learning. Make presentations, for example, to faculty, to the Senate, to individual student groups and student government, and to the college governance structure. Specific activities might include presentations at College institutes, attending Center meetings, and publicizing service learning through the development of articles in *Communitas*, e-mails to faculty, and distribution of written information to the faculty, students and staff.
 - Develop the tools and materials necessary to educate the members of the college. The first tools necessary are the community demand survey, an inventory of current service learning projects, and examples of successful projects at other institutions.
- While developing an awareness of student learning and increasing the number of service learning opportunities offered by the College, the committee should emphasize flexibility. Service learning may be accomplished in a variety of different ways. Service learning should not be made a mandatory part of a course syllabus. The Design Team stresses that service learning options must be provided at the discretion of the instructor; if service learning options are suggested, these options may be completed by students in lieu of existing projects, papers, assignments, etc. Recognizing that the content of course syllabinas been developed with rigor and with attention to the specific course

- objectives, we believe that service learning must not require additional work from the students or the faculty member. Rather, service learning should be used to provide new experiences and learning opportunities that replace (rather than add to) existing course responsibilities.
- The committee must include representation from each academic Center and from a wide variety of College offices. Input from the Registrar's office, for example, would be useful in exploring potential SL (service learning) designations on transcripts, the mechanism that could be used to add one credit to a three-credit course, and the policies in place to record projects on the co-curricular transcript. Administrative Services representation is essential in determining FTE / tuition ramifications when adding one credit to a course. The office of the Vice President for Learning and Academic Affairs may answer questions regarding any need to secure New York State Education or SUNY input in course structure changes. We also recognize that there are contractual issues that will be discussed; these include the issue of faculty load computation for courses that might be both 3-credit and 4-credit at the same time and the possibility of stipends for developing service learning opportunities. The committee responsible for developing service learning at the College should be broad-based and as inclusive as possible. Representation from the community we serve is recommended.
- We recommend that the committee be charged with developing a comprehensive plan and the tools necessary to begin to implement that plan in a two-year period. We recommend that the committee submit a progress report, each semester, to the Vice President for Learning and Academic Affairs.

Addenda

- Distinctions between volunteerism, community service, and service learning (Monroe Community College)
- The Student Development Record (SDR).
- Service Learning Resources. If you are interested in learning more about service learning, resources are available to all faculty and staff. A resource library is housed in Payne Hall 380A, the office of Susan Smith, Adjunct and Service Learning Liaison. Resources include program models, student and faculty manuals, time logs, service learning proposal templates, information regarding service learning certificates and course designations, and academic literature discussing the subject of service learning. A bibliography of books and web sites discussing service learning is found on a learning page of the College's LibGuide; that learning page is found at http://mvcc.libguides.com/aecontent.php?