

Extract from A Good Practice Guide and Self-evaluation Instruments for Managing the Quality of Service-Learning

The HEQC's service-learning priorities are evident from its Criteria for Institutional Audits (2004) and Criteria for Programme Accreditation (2004).

- Criterion 7 Institutional Audits & criterion 1 Programme Accreditation: Service learning programmes which are integrated into institutional and academic planning
- Criterion 18 Institutional Audits: Quality-related arrangements for community engagement are formalised and integrated with those for teaching and learning

This Guide is to be read in conjunction with the self-evaluation instruments (institutional, faculty/school, programme/ qualification and module/ course levels), which consist of indicators and evaluative questions to enable an institution to validate its service-learning function and activities. African higher education has sharpened its focus, defining community engagement not as one of the three silos of higher education along with teaching and research, but as an integral part of teaching and research – as a mechanism to infuse and enrich teaching and research with a deeper sense of context, locality and application.

In the Glossary of the HEQC's Framework for Institutional Audits (June 2004: 15) 'community engagement' is defined as follows:

Initiatives and processes through which the expertise of the higher education institution in the areas of teaching and research are applied to address issues relevant to its community. Community engagement typically finds expression in a variety of forms, ranging from informal and relatively unstructured activities to formal and structured academic programmes addressed at particular community needs (service-learning programmes).

Consequently, it can be argued that community engagement, as a scholarly activity, is of critical importance both in shaping our students and future citizens and in producing knowledge that is the most relevant and useful to the South African context. Community engagement can take on many different forms and shapes within the context of higher education, as is illustrated in figure 1 [p. 13].

... community engagement are not necessarily discrete or mutually exclusive. For example, the boundaries between 'volunteerism' and 'community outreach'; 'internships' and 'co-operative education'; 'community outreach' and 'service-learning'; and finally 'co-operative education' and 'service-learning' are often blurred, and programmes may shift one way or the other on this continuum. A characteristic common to all of the above forms of community engagement is that they all embrace a measure of experiential learning.

Generally, internships are fully integrated with the student's curriculum. Internships (also referred to as 'clinical practice' in some instances) are used extensively in many professional programmes such as Social Work, Medicine, Education, and Psychology.

Likewise, the primary beneficiary of co-operative education programmes is the student and the primary goal is student learning. Co-operative education provides students with co-curricular opportunities that are related to, but not always fully integrated with, the curriculum.

Co-operative student placements are essentially within industry whereas service-learning placements are within service agencies or directly in the community. Whereas the desired outcome of co-operative education is essentially student learning, service learning includes the additional goal of providing a service to the community. Nevertheless, in terms of student learning outcomes, both

co-operative education and service-learning share the goal of enriching the students' understanding of the course content and discipline.

Service-learning modules or courses engage students in activities where both the community and student are primary beneficiaries and where the primary goals are to provide a service to the community and, equally, to enhance student learning through rendering this service.

While the above types of experiential learning include aspects of community engagement, some (i.e. volunteerism; community outreach) emphasise community service while others (i.e. internships; co-operative education) emphasise student learning. Service-learning represents a balanced approach to, and an integration of, community service and student learning.

Within the service-learning context, 'communities' refers to those specific, local, collective interest groups that participate in the service-learning activities of the institution. Such communities are regarded as partners (i.e. no longer as 'recipients'), who have a full say in the identification of service needs and development challenges. Such communities also: participate in defining the service-learning and development outcomes; identify the relevant assets that they have in place; evaluate the impact; and contribute substantially to the mutual search for sustainable solutions to challenges.

The field of experiential education is the pedagogical foundation of service-learning. To ensure that service promotes substantive learning, service-learning connects students' experience to reflection and analysis in the curriculum (Duley, 1981).

Factors considered critical at an institutional level are: [6th] Allocation of resources: Does the institution allocate resources such as physical space, human resources and operating costs to the implementation of its community engagement strategy?

At a course (or module) level critical factors determining the success of service-learning include the following:

- Reciprocity: Is there reciprocity between those served and those who learn, that is, between communities and their needs for assistance, on the one hand, and HEIs and their desires to augment student learning and research on the other?
- Collaboration: Is the course designed, implemented and assessed collaboratively with the participating community and service agencies?
- Needs assessment: Is the course informed by an assessment of community needs?
- Alignment of service and learning goals: In order for effective service and learning to be achieved, alignment between service and learning goals is critical.
- Student placements: Is the student placement suited to the desired service and learning outcomes? Is there adequate and appropriate supervision for students at the site? Have those responsible for student supervision been adequately prepared, recognised and rewarded?
- Student orientation: Have students been adequately prepared for their community placement?
- Role clarification: Are the roles and responsibilities of all participants (i.e. academic staff, students, community, and service agencies) explicit and clear to themselves and to others?
- Reflection: Has adequate time been set aside for structured critical reflection on the service experience and its illumination of the theory presented in the course?
- Logistics: Have proper and effective arrangements been made?