



A Guide to Reflection in Service–Learning at USI

Reflection: (*Critical*) Reflection is the intentional component that takes a service activity and makes it a service–learning project. This is achieved by tying a reflective assignment to one or more service–learning outcomes.

To do so, a reflective assignment may ask students to discuss their service experience in ways that:

- Prompt them to apply the academic knowledge gained in a course to their real–world experience in service.
- Challenge them to scrutinize their own assumptions and preconceived notions about the world.
- Encourage them to examine social inequality and injustices in our world.
- Inspire them to consider their civic responsibility to their community and the people in it.

How do I prepare my students for reflection?

It is important to explain the value, expectations, and purpose of the project and the critical reflection to enhance the commitment students give to a service–learning project and the benefits they receive from it. These should be discussed in class, and ***stated in the course syllabus***

The value and purpose of critical reflection in service–learning is clearly articulated by Ash, Clayton, and Moses (2009):

Because service–learning is a form of experiential education, critical reflection is key to maximizing its effectiveness for you as well as for the community members with whom you are serving.

The purpose of the critical component of service–learning, therefore, is to help you generate, deepen, and document your learning so that you can build on it for:

- Continuous personal growth, throughout and beyond the service–learning experience

- Continuous improvement in the quality of your service and in your capacity for citizenship and change agency, throughout and beyond the service-learning experience
- Continuous academic learning, throughout and beyond the service-learning experience

How do I create a reflective assignment?

A reflective assignment can take many forms and can be completed by an individual or a group. Some of the forms it can take are:

- Short essay/paper
- Longer paper
- Oral presentation
- Guided discussion in class
- Journal/dairy
- Post on social media
- Blogging
- Log book
- Etc.

Quality critical reflection activities include the following key elements –

- Three guiding questions – **What? So what? Now what?** (From–Johns Hopkins, SOURCE, <http://www.jhsph.edu/offices-and-services/source/publications-and-resources/service-learning-toolkit/reflection.html>)

What?

Objectively report what happened. What happened? What did you observe? What issue is being addressed or population is being served? What were the results of the project? What events or “critical incidents” occurred?

So what?

Discuss feelings, ideas, and analysis of the service experience. What was learned? What difference did the event make? Did you learn a new skill? How is your experience different from what you expected? What impacts the way you view the situation/experience? What did you like/dislike about the experience? What are some of the pressing needs in the community? How did this project address those needs?

Now what?

Consider the broader implications of the service experience. What are the root causes of the issue/problem addressed? What contributes to the success of a project like this? What hinders success? What learning occurred for you in this experience? How can you apply this learning? If you could do the project again what would you do

differently?

- **The Four Cs** (Eyler, Giles, and Schmiede ,1996):

Continuously implemented throughout the course	Connected to course goals and objectives
Challenging to students assumptions	Contextualize to course, student knowledge and ability

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Can I see some examples of reflective assignments?

Here is an example of two reflective short paper assignments that students completed before and after a service-learning project where they assisted during youth night and teen night at the Potter's Wheel Ministries (provided by Antonina Bambina, Ph.D., Director of the Honors Program, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Presidential Scholars Co-coordinator, University of Southern Indiana).

Reflective assignment before the service-learning activity

Service-Learning Assignment #1----Example

This assignment is due in class BEFORE you have volunteered at Potter's Wheel because it is about your expectations of what you will experience at Potter's Wheel. Please complete this assignment BEFORE you go to Potter's Wheel.

The purpose of this assignment is to give you an opportunity to reflect on your experience with the Potter's Wheel project and tie it to the course. For these assignments, I ask you to do more than simply recount what you are asked about. I would like you to analyze, integrate and apply what you have read, discussed and experienced.

(Community Partner) came and talked to us a bit about the Potter's Wheel Ministries and then sent us some pointers about working with the kids there. Potter's Wheel Ministries also has a website and Facebook page for more information about the organization and what they do there. Before Amanda came to class, we read a chapter about poverty in America and why it should matter to everyone. Please write about the following topics/questions using knowledge you've gained from Amanda's talk, pointers, the Potter's Wheel website and/or Facebook page and the class reading on poverty. Be sure to specify how each of these is incorporated in your answer.

1. What do you expect the kids at Potter's Wheel will be like? What kind of experience do you think you will have working with them? What are you looking forward to and what are you concerned about? (your answer should be about 1 paragraph)

1. The author of the reading on poverty in America gave us a number of reasons why we should care about poverty in America. Please write about two of the reasons he talks about that you think might be relevant when you are working with the kids at Potter's Wheel. You can focus on the three areas we talked about in class (health care, education, and crime) and/or you can broaden your ideas to the three areas he covers in the pages we read at the beginning of the chapter (self-interested, our values, and shared-responsibility). (your answer should be 2 paragraphs – one for each reason you write about)

Reflective assignment after the service-learning activity

Service- Learning Assignment #2-----Example

This assignment is due in class after you have volunteered at Potter's Wheel because it is about your actual experience at Potter's Wheel. Please complete this assignment after you go to Potter's Wheel.

The purpose of this assignment is to give you an opportunity to reflect on your experience with the Potter's Wheel project and tie it to the course. For these assignments, I ask you to do more than simply recount what you are asked about. I would like you to analyze, integrate and apply what we have read, discussed and experienced.

For this second service-learning assignment, I will be adding the current bill to cut food stamps to the material from which you will draw to reflect on your experience. You will need to listen to a debate on **The Diane Rehm Show** about the bill to cut \$39 billion from the food stamp program that was passed in the House last week. You can find the debate using the link at the bottom of the page.

After going to Potter's Wheel and listening to this link, please write about the following topics/questions using knowledge you've gained from Amanda's talk, pointers, the Potter's Wheel website and/or Facebook page, the class reading on poverty, and this episode of the Diane Rehm Show. Be sure to specify how each of these is incorporated in your answer.

1. What kind of experience did you have working with the kids at Potter's Wheel? What did you learn from your experience? What did you find surprising about your experience. Did something from the reading on poverty in America stand out in relation to your experience at Potter's Wheel? You should write down at least some notes about your experience as soon as you can after you volunteer while your thoughts are still fresh in your mind. (your answer should be about 1 paragraph)
1. After listening to the debate on **The Diane Rehm Show**, discuss one argument in this debate that made you think this bill to cut money from the food stamps program is the right thing to do. Then discuss one argument in this debate that made you think this bill to cut money from the food stamps program is not the right thing to do. The bill to cut food stamps will affect the kids you worked with at Potter's Wheel. In your discussion for and against this bill please include your thoughts about the bill in relation to them. (your answer should be about 2 paragraph)

The Diane Rehm Show: [The Politics of Food Stamps](#)

September 23, 2013

House Republicans pass a bill to cut \$39 billion from food stamp programs. We explore the politics of food stamp spending.

<http://thedianerehmshow.org/shows/2013-09-23/politics-food-stamps>

Sources

Ash, S, Clayton, P, and Moses, M. (2009). *Learning through critical reflection: A tutorial for service-learning students*. Raleigh, NC.

Eyler, J., Giles, D.E., and Schmiede, A. (1996). *A Practitioner's Guide to Reflection in Service-Learning: Student Voices and Reflections*. Nashville, TN.

Johns Hopkins, SOURCE, <http://www.jhsph.edu/offices-and-services/source/publications-and-resources/service-learning-toolkit/reflection.html>)

