TYPES OF SERVICE

Volunteerism

Volunteerism is the engagement of students in activities where the primary emphasis is on the service being provided and the primary intended beneficiary is clearly the service recipient.

Example: A school-based program in which student-volunteers occasionally or regularly visit the local hospital to sit with Alzheimer patients who need some company. The primary intended beneficiaries of the service are the Alzheimer patients (the service recipients), and the focus of the activity is on providing a service to them. Although the student-volunteers may receive some benefits from the experience (i.e.: feeling pleased with themselves) as well as learn something in the process, these outcomes are clearly serendipitous and unintentional.

Community Service

Community service is the engagement of the students in activities that primarily focus on the service being provided as well as the benefits the service activities have on the recipients (i.e.: providing food to the homeless during the holidays). The students receive some benefits by learning more about how their service makes a difference in the lives of the service recipients.

Example: School-based community service programs that might include semester-long or year-long activities in which students dedicate themselves to addressing a cause that meets a local community (or global) need. Recycling, hunger awareness, and environmental improvement are all forms of community service causes around which students have formed organizations to formally and actively address the issue. While students’ primary purpose for engaging in the service activity is to advance the cause, their engagement allows them to learn more about the cause and what is needed to be done to ensure the cause is dealt with effectively.

Service-Learning

Service-learning programs are distinguished from other approaches to experiential education by their intention to equally benefit the provider and the recipient of the service as well as to ensure equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring. Service-learning programs must have some academic context and be designed in such a way that ensures that both the service enhances the learning and the learning enhances the service -- service is integrated into the course.

Example: A pre-med student in a course on the Physiology of the Aging might apply the theories and the skills learned in that course to providing mobility assistance to seniors at the local senior citizen center. While the program is intended to provide a much needed service to the seniors, the program is also intended to help the student better understand how men and women age differently, how the physical aging of the body affects mobility, and how seniors can learn to deal with diminishing range of motion and mobility. The focus is both on providing a service as well as on the student learning, and consequently, the intentional beneficiaries are both the student who provides the service and the senior for whom the service is provided. It is this balance that distinguishes service-learning from all other experiential education programs.