

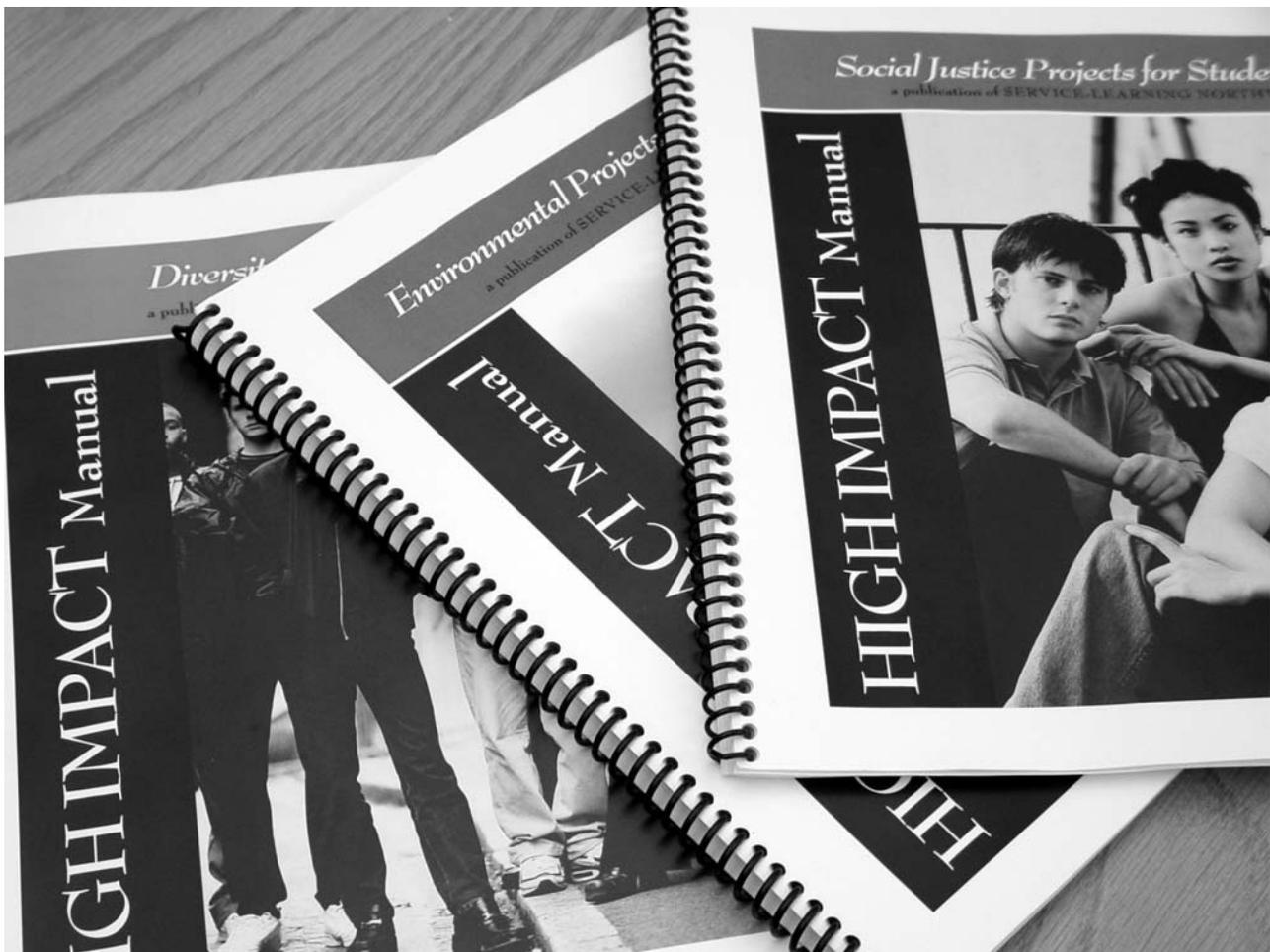
Information for Administrators, Educators,  
Parents and Students

*Resources for Senior, Culminating or Capstone projects*

HIGH IMPACT Manuals



## About High Impact Manuals...



# A Few Words for Administrators, Educators, and Parents

*on senior culminating projects and service-learning*

## What is a senior, capstone, or culminating project?

The “senior project” has been defined as a culminating high school initiative that demonstrates your students’ ability to write, speak, acquire and use knowledge, solve problems, and apply a variety of skills, including time management and task analysis. It is a culminating assessment that demonstrates what students know and can do as they prepare to graduate. It prepares them for college and/or the workplace and can help them transform their senior year into one that is uniquely challenging and stimulating.

The project normally requires that students use comprehensive resources as they work through the four general phases of the process, namely;

1. writing a research paper that reflects their information acquisition and literacy skills;
2. conducting a rigorous, self-identified project;
3. developing a portfolio demonstrating and verifying the process they used; and
4. delivering a formal — usually oral — presentation on their findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Sometimes these projects are referred to as the “capstone project,” reflecting the fact that the initiative is, indeed, the “top stone of a structure,” in this case, the high school experience. The term “culminating project” is a reminder that in some ways the initiative is like a high school commencement, that is, it is surely not the end of learning but could well be the beginning of a life-long process of productive research, meaningful study, and useful actions to meet compelling community problems or needs. The “community” may be the students’ home, town, county, state, country, and – indeed – world.

## Where did the concept come from?

Although the practice has been in use during the past decade, it received an added impetus from the work of the *National Commission on the High School Senior Year*. In October 2001, the Commission – chaired by the Governor of Kentucky — released a report called *Raising Our Sights: No High School Senior Left Behind*. Earlier it had issued a report aptly called *The Lost Opportunity of the Senior Year*. The Commission called for a rigorous alternative to traditional senior years that merely prolonged “seat time” by encouraging the development of “capstone projects,” meaningful internships, and the opportunities to take college-level courses.

All students, they asserted, should be provided with a “demanding array” of educational alternatives in high school. Besides dual enrollment in high school and college, “this might mean service-learning opportunities” and completing a capstone or research project. (We will have much more to say about “service-learning” shortly since we strongly recommend that service-learning be a central focus of these project – whether we call them Senior, Culminating, or Capstone!)

Many school districts throughout the county have begun to require these projects and more and more states are following the lead of Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Washington in having graduation policies mandating senior projects.

**The Washington State Board of Education has instituted the following requirement:**

Each student shall complete a culminating project for graduation. The project consists of the student demonstrating both their learning competencies and preparation related to Learning Goals Three and Four.

- Learning Goal Three is to “think analytically, logically, and creatively, and integrating experiences and knowledge to form reasoned judgments and solve problems.”
- Learning Goal Four is to “understand the importance of work and how performance, effort, and decisions directly affect career and educational opportunities.”

Beginning with the Class of 2008, all Washington graduates must complete an integrated learning project that

*...helps students understand the connections between school and the real world by studying a topic they like and presenting their findings to teachers, community members and other students.*

Students from Maine to Florida and from California to Washington are seizing the opportunity to learn in this way and, more importantly, to learn and serve. The three High Impact Project Manuals on issues relating to the environment, social justice, and diversity include many supportive materials and specific resources that will help to assure that your students’ impact is the highest it can possibly be. Our goal is to assist them in designing high quality projects that not only satisfy the graduation requirement but help them go beyond the minimum in both the learning and the impact.

## What is the rationale for these projects – and what are the impacts?

Many teachers and principals have indicated that seniors who are involved in these projects have become accountable for applying what they have learned over the years; and have become explorers, creators, risk takers, decision makers, and leaders. Teachers themselves have become facilitators of learning rather than the proverbial “sages on the stage.” The concept is enjoying mounting success because teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community members are involved in cooperative ownership.

Seniors are required to model active and independent learning. The entire school often senses and sees changes in the schools’ climate and culture. Simply being a senior is not enough, for now they have to demonstrate skills in research, information acquisition and literacy, communication, writing, doing, synthesizing, and analyzing. The reasons why schools exist even is called into question. Seniors have been known to spend hours thinking about the choices involved in identifying issues to study.

It has been said that about three-quarters of the underclassmen and women in high



schools are “wanna be’s,” that is, they want to be seniors! They watch seniors, model what they do, and can’t wait to be seniors themselves. But when they see seniors as disengaged, laid back, and bored, they

often perceive the last year of high school as unimportant. But when they see seniors as excited, involved, and “un-bored,” something happens to them. They too become “alive and kicking.” In short, the culminating experience demands student initiative and skill sophistication and, when it does, everyone benefits.

The results have been impressive. According to the researchers at SERVE, Inc., a regional educational laboratory, the strong and positive impact on the students, schools, community, and faculty is evident in nearly every senior project school. A long-term, in-depth survey shows consistent positive impact on the students, 94% of whom were very proud of their accomplishments.

### **Students support senior projects:**

*"I think the senior exhibition helped me to see things in a different way and to become more responsible in my life."*

*"Very good experience; it got me a job."*

*"It was challenging, but at the same time it was fun. I would be happy to do it over again. Now that I've completed it, I'm glad it is a graduation requirement because it gives the seniors one last big assignment that we have to take seriously."*

*"The portfolio should be used in the future; it's a great learning experience with great learning results. It was worth my time and I'm glad I did it."*

*"The senior project helped me a lot. I improved my writing skills, organizational skills, and it showed me I could reach my goals."*

### **Community members offer positive comments:**

*"Overall, they were wonderful Senior Projects. Keep it up."*

*"I believe Senior Projects are a great chance for the students to study a subject of interest and helps them decide if they are going to continue this subject in college."*

*"The students did a great job. The community is very supportive."*

*"I suggest that more people from the community get involved. It is a wonderful experience and a wonderful project. I am very proud of the seniors."*

*"The exhibitions were great. Students knew what they were doing."*

*"Very much enjoyed the experience and would love to do it again."*

*"Continue the program. At first the students were afraid to start the project, but after it was completed you could see a huge change in their level of confidence."*

## Teachers offer suggestions:

*"Don't approve 'light' topics."*

*"It would be nice to have an outline of each presenter's speech to look at what they are presenting."*

*"Videotape the students prior to their presentations." "Students need to proofread their research papers."*

## SERVE staff provides important reflection:

We do not believe a diploma is a 'given,' but 'earned.' Earning a diploma, like most things of worth, takes time, work, focus and, we believe, a competent and accountable skill demonstration the exit year. In other words, a culminating performance demanding sophisticated skill application and student initiative should be standard exit expectations. It is our belief that there is everything right with a requisite challenging seniors to model hard work, problem solve, practice self-directed learning, and exhibit excitement and interest in reaching a personal educational goal.

## Training and professional development workshops are available:



A number of organizations have begun to develop training and technical assistance workshops and related materials on senior projects. For example, the SERVE Center for Continuous Improvement, a regional educational laboratory in North Carolina, has sponsored institutes for participating teams of high school teachers,

both new and experienced in facilitating senior projects. These professional development activities have explored all aspects of senior projects including their connection to school-to-work programs; involving parents, counselors, and community members; and program evaluation. [Note The regional laboratory also has established a group in Medford, Oregon (SERVE, Inc.) whose primary function is to focus on issues relating to senior projects. They can be reached at the following e-mail address: [seniorproject@serve.org](mailto:seniorproject@serve.org); their web address is – [www.seniorproject.net](http://www.seniorproject.net).]

## What is the specific nature of these projects?

The “knowledge base” on senior, capstone, and culminating projects is very impressive. We have attempted to summarize the essential features that practitioners have written about. The following four steps have been identified in the literature:

1. Qualities of a comprehensive research paper: informational literacy and knowledge acquisition skills; challenging, skilled research; excellent writing; strong content; source variety; and ethically sound. The paper should represent a significant extension of the student’s knowledge of the subject, be based on a thesis, be well organized and convincing, contain proper documentation, and be free from spelling and grammatical errors.
2. The project should be a significant “learning stretch,” that is, it poses a challenge that requires new learning. Products emanating from the project should be a logical outgrowth of the research paper, should demonstrate student creativity and mastery of the topic, and show attention to detail.
3. The portfolio represents a learning “journey.” It is reflective, validates the students’ work, and verifies the learning process.
4. Senior boards — as they are often called — are formal oral presentations before a team of judges. Presentations should be well organized, demonstrate knowledge of the subject and the connection between the project and the paper; model good delivery; and use appropriate tools such as Power Point, audio-visual, tri-fold boards, and the like. The presenter needs to be competent in responding to questions.

## What is community service-learning?

Service-learning has been defined in a variety of ways. For example, it is commonly considered as a teaching method that engages students in service to their communities as a means of enriching academic learning, promoting personal growth, and helping young people acquire skills needed for productive citizenship. Carol Kinsley, a long-time leader in this area, describes service-learning as “a method of teaching involving ways in which students participate in experiences where they make a difference by helping others.” However, it was former astronaut and senator John Glenn, who chaired the National Commission on Service-Learning, who nailed down the term with these three precise, descriptive words: “academics in action.” That is precisely what service-learning is: actively applying students’ academic knowledge and skills where it counts by addressing the compelling needs of the community.

Service-learning is related to, but actually, different from its first cousin, “community service.” Community service – valuable in its own right — is either direct or indirect service in the community that is not explicitly tied to the curriculum, e.g, such direct services as visiting the elderly, planting gardens, or peer tutoring and mentoring or such “behind the scenes” indirect services as food or clothing drives in which the

service providers might not come into contact with those they serve. Community service becomes service-learning, however, when it is tied to specific academic or civic learning outcomes. The projects can and should be based on compelling community problems and needs and tied back to curricular learning outcomes. *That is service-learning in a nutshell.*



The term service-learning (with and without the hyphen) increasingly has appeared on school radar screens during the past ten or more years, reflecting the fact that this approach to learning has proven to be an effective learning strategy. Does it matter that sometimes a hyphen is used to connect the two words and sometimes it is not? Well, yes it does. The hyphen implies a two-way street: service enhanced through learning and learning enhanced through service. The two are inseparable and should be connected to illustrate their unbreakable linkage.

However, let there be no mistake: the purpose of schooling is, and always will be, for young people to learn. But learn what? Surely, there are many things: academic knowledge (to be sure), but also a wide array of other learnings: communication skills, analytic skills, work attitudes and skills, life skills, problem-solving and decision-making skills, leadership skills, social competencies, dependability, empathy, acceptance of cultural differences, a sense of civic responsibility, citizenship skills and competencies, and learning to serve others. We are talking about two kinds of learnings: head-learning and heart-learning. You can't separate the two.



Service-learning is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of students and provides structured time for students to reflect on the service experience. This approach to learning resonates with many teachers since service-learning totally engages students in their learning – and what can be better than seeing a room full of young activists trying to turn their communities into better places in which to live?

Incidentally, for the record, a number of evaluation studies have been conducted on service-learning. And “the votes are in,” as they say. It has been widely reported that service-learning has a positive effect on the personal development of young people; has a positive effect in students’ interpersonal development and the ability to relate to culturally diverse groups; helps develop students’ sense of civic and social responsibility and citizenship skills; helps students acquire academic skills and knowledge; is associated with increased student attendance; helps students become more knowledgeable and realistic about careers; improves the overall school climate; and leads to more positive perceptions of schools and youth by community members.

### **Where do service-learning students and teachers begin?**

Here, too, much has been written about “where to begin.” Cathryn Berger Kaye, a service-learning consultant from California, suggests five possible “points of departure:”

- an identified community need,
- a student-identified need,
- a theme or unit of study,
- an existing activity and “transforming” it into a service-learning activity, and
- the standard curriculum – content and skills – followed with a “natural extension into service.”

Rahima Wade, a professor at the University of Iowa, suggests similar routes to take in beginning service-learning activities:

- a meaningful problem or need identified by a community organization or constituency,
- the student’s, teacher’s, or parent’s personal connection to an area of concern and their established connection with a community group or involvement with social or environmental issues,
- the curriculum objectives, or
- community agencies or environmental areas within walking distance of the school (thus saving on transportation costs).

All of these are legitimate places to begin.



We will continue this discussion – and provide concrete resources for your students to use — in the three High Impact Project Manuals. The three manuals deal with a variety of environmental, social justice, and diversity service-learning issues.

Let us conclude this brief introduction by returning to – and amending – the second paragraph in this paper. We now present the following four steps:

The project requires that students use comprehensive resources as they work through the general phases of the process, namely;

1. writing a research paper that reflects their information acquisition and literacy skills;
2. conducting a rigorous, self-identified *community service-learning project that addresses a compelling community need and that is tied directly to your curricular learning outcomes.*
3. developing a portfolio demonstrating and verifying the process students used; and
4. delivering a formal — usually oral — presentation on their findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Service-learning adds several ingredients to senior, capstone, and culminating projects, namely, *caring, commitment, and civic responsibility.*



## Brief examples of Senior Projects in Pennsylvania

The Pennsylvania Department of Education now requires all high school students to complete a senior project as part of the graduation requirement. The purpose is to (1) enable students to demonstrate that they are to apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information; and (2) provide students a vehicle for communicating knowledge and understanding.

High schools in Pennsylvania design their senior projects as they best fit into their existing programs. At both Harriton (HHS) and Lower Merion (LMHS) high schools, the senior project is a self-directed, investigative exploration of a topic of interest of the individual student. While both high schools have differences in how they are conducting the senior project, the major components are the same.

LMHS students are required to write a proposal paper, keep a reflective journal, submit a final reflective essay, and give a final presentation. HHS students are required to develop a project proposal/essential question, write a research paper and annotated bibliography, and give a final presentation. At both high schools, most of the senior projects involve a significant community-based experience external to the school environment. This particular phase of the senior project is called the "experiential phase." In May, students are released from school to conduct the experiential phase. In June, the seniors conclude their projects by returning to school to make final presentations to a panel.

The Senior Project Coordinator at LMHS has stated that "the senior project is not (solely) about fulfilling a requirement but learning that the biggest transition to the adult world is doing things for yourself not because it is required for you to do by the school or your parents." Source: SERVE Inc.

## Examples of service-learning projects about 9/11

- Journalism students at one high school are exploring the impact of September 11 by researching former high school students who are members of the armed services. Students will publish biographies and pictures of these former students to bring attention to the service these men and women have performed. The students will improve their research, writing, and photography skills, while documenting local history and the impact of current events.
- On the anniversary of September 11, one volunteer resource center will initiate a recycling program in partnership with a local school. Students at the school will develop and staff a recycling project for the entire community. Research on the rebuilding efforts necessary to respond to tragedy will also be tied to awareness of the environment and the importance of involving the entire community in such issues. Through the project, students will apply planning and math skills and learn about the environment and the history of America's responses to crises. Source: Students in Service to America, USA Freedom Corps and the Corporation for National and Community Service, August 2002.

## National sources of information on service-learning

### Learn and Serve America

c/o Corporation for National and Community Service  
1201 New York Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20525 • [www.nationalservice.org](http://www.nationalservice.org)

### National Service-Learning Clearinghouse

c/o ETR Associates  
4 Carbonero Way  
Scotts Valley, CA 95066 • [www.servicelearning.org](http://www.servicelearning.org)

### National Service-Learning Partnership

c/o Academy for Educational Development  
100 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10011 • [www.servicelearningpartnership.org](http://www.servicelearningpartnership.org)



# A Few Words for Students

## *on high-impact project manuals*

*“The problem is not the problem.  
What you are not doing about the problem,  
is the problem.”*

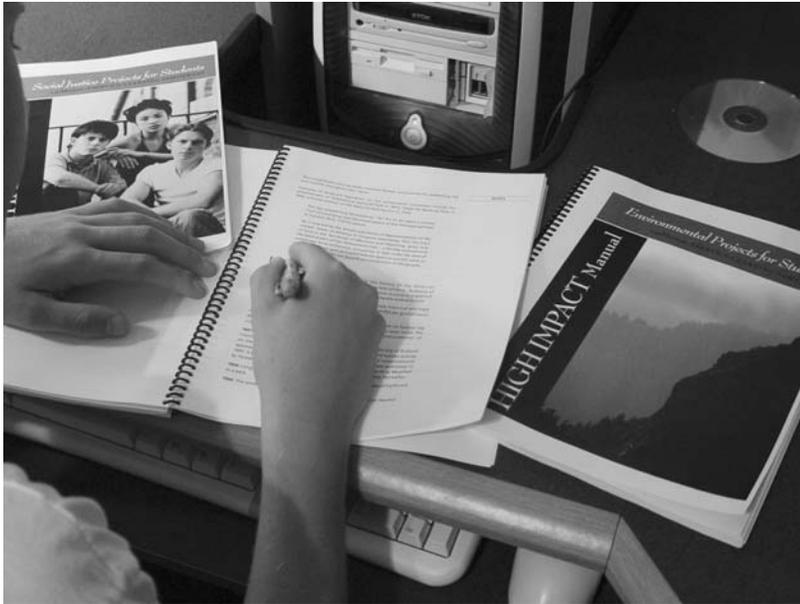
The problem is not the real problem. According to this quote, you may be “the problem” or at least what you are not doing about the problem is the real problem. This somewhat tongue-in-cheek quote highlights a very important notion: that we really have the ability to solve many of the problems, issues and injustices in our community, in our country and in our world. What is lacking are people who choose to do something about these problems. Your culminating project is your opportunity to change that. It is your opportunity to “do” something about a problem, an issue of your own choosing.

High Impact Project Manuals were developed to provide you with both the skills and knowledge needed to effectively address issues and needs in your community and to incorporate those activities into high quality culminating projects. In spite of the sentiment in the quote above, many young people today are looking for opportunities to act on things that matter to them and get involved with their community. The High Impact Project Manuals are designed as an avenue for action and a vehicle for involvement that meets the requirements for culminating projects. These manuals are built on the belief that you are highly capable and that you can have an impact on issues important to you and your community. In other words, you can “do” something and in doing so, you can make a difference. These manuals are offered as means for accomplishing that in the context of meeting your Culminating Project Graduation Requirements.

Every culminating project is an opportunity for you to realize that you have the power to make a difference. Culminating projects can be designed to address projects focused on prevention, or intervention, or information. Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize winner, once said that “There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest.” His point is that, no matter who you are, you can always do something. Wiesel says you must act even if it is only protesting. You have the ability to make a difference, either by undertaking a culminating project that addresses an injustice (prevention or intervention) or, at the very least, designing a project to protest it and make others aware (information). That might be as simple as determining that

senior citizens in your community should be honored rather than ignored. This “protest” (information) regarding the role of seniors allows you to make an important statement and, more importantly, an important contribution to a matter of importance to you and your community. Or, you might decide to create a visitation program that connects volunteer visitors with homebound seniors (intervention). Whether through a project of prevention, intervention, or information, you can take advantage of the Culminating Project requirement to design activities that actually make a difference in your life, in the lives of others, and in the life of your community. It is up to you. It is your choice.

## The Goals of The High Impact Project Manuals



There are three separate High Impact Project Manuals each with a different theme. One focuses on environmental issues, one addresses social justice concerns, and one concentrates on questions of diversity. Each manual is divided into four sections. The first section of each manual explores the overall background and history of the general topic area including brief biographies of key historical figures. In addition, students will find references throughout the section for additional related research. The second section provides an extensive list of both web-based and print resources that support a variety of issues within the general topic area and provide a research base for the project. The third section provides examples of service activities that can be implemented in conjunction with the culminating research project based on the particular theme. The final section includes a number of planning tools that will aid in the development of high quality, high impact culminating projects.

## A Word about Culminating Projects

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction lists the following high school graduation requirement:

Beginning with the Class of 2008, all Washington graduates must: Complete a culminating project - This integrated learning project helps students understand the connection between school and the real world by studying a topic they like and presenting their findings to teachers, community members and other students. (<http://www.k12.wa.us/communications/GradReq.aspx>)

The Washington State Board of Education offers more specific direction.

WAC 180-51-061. "Footnote 8: Each Student shall complete a culminating project for graduation. The project consists of the student demonstrating both their learning competencies and preparations related to learning goals three and four. Each district shall define the process to implement this graduation requirement, including assessment criteria, in written district policy." (<http://www.sbe.wa.gov/graduation.htm>)

The Board adds:

- Each student shall complete a culminating project
- Each student will have the flexibility to construct their own culminating project. Including:
  - Choice of topic
  - Flexibility to design project framework
  - Choice of delivery method/design type of presentation
  - Choice of mentor
  - Design evaluation to assess the effect of project
- Each student will demonstrate essential skills through Reading, Writing, Speaking, Producing and/or Performing.

## Why use Service-Learning?

Service-Learning is an ideal way to incorporate your choice and your voice with regards to choice of topic, flexibility of the project, design of the service, and the reflection and evaluation. Service-learning also encourages you to choose a mentor who specializes in a particular field. It also provides you an excellent way to "perform" the essential skills you have learned. Service-learning strengthens your learning while meeting a genuine community need.

Eleanor Roosevelt once wrote, "In a democratic society we must live cooperatively, and serve the community in which we live, to the best of our ability. For our own success to be real, it must contribute to the success of others." A service-learning



culminating project makes your success real because you use your learning to contribute to the success (and education) of others. So what precisely is service-learning?

## **What Is Service-Learning?**

The High Impact Project Manuals utilize a methodology known as service-learning to ensure that action has understanding and that learning has meaningful expression.

Over the years, academic service-learning has gained acceptance among many educators as an effective teaching methodology. Academic service-learning focuses on providing academic instruction through service experiences. It connects classroom learning and community service, using the service as a context for teaching.

### **ACADEMIC SERVICE-LEARNING**

The Office of Academic Service-Learning at Eastern Michigan University defines Academic Service-Learning as “a teaching methodology that utilizes community service as a means of helping students gain a deeper understanding of course objectives, acquire new knowledge, and engage in civic activity.” (2001)

Service-learning has been defined in a variety of ways. For example, it is commonly considered as a teaching method that engages students in service to their communities as a means of enriching academic learning, promoting personal growth, and helping young people acquire skills needed for productive citizenship. Carol Kinsley, a long-time leader in this area, describes service-learning as “a method of teaching involving ways in which students participate in experiences where they make a difference by helping others.” However, it was former astronaut and senator John Glenn, chair of the National Commission on Service-Learning, who nailed down the term with these three precise, descriptive words: “academics in action.” That is precisely what service-learning is: actively applying your academic knowledge and skills where it counts by addressing the compelling needs of your community.

While many organizations define service-learning differently, there are several components that are common to virtually all definitions. We call these “defining characteristics.”



### **THREE DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS**

There are three essential, or defining, characteristics of service-learning that virtually all definitions contain. It is the presence of these common elements that distinguish service-learning from other hands-on and project-based learning experiences and distinguishes it from community service.

**CLEAR LEARNING OBJECTIVES CONNECTED TO CURRICULUM.** This connection to the classroom curriculum is what sets service-learning apart from community service and from volunteering in general.

**MEET GENUINE COMMUNITY NEEDS.** The strength of service-learning is that learning is utilized to make a real difference. It is in the genuineness of the work involved that young people find the power of learning. The significance of the service performed also enhances the personal, social, and civic development of the participant. This is what sets service-learning apart from other forms of experiential or simulated learning.

**SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION.** One of the most powerful and important components of high impact service-learning is reflection. Rather than being viewed as a summary of activity, reflection is understood to be an effective form of teaching which, when coupled with clear learning objectives and genuine community needs, has the power to not only strengthen both service and learning but to transform the learner and teacher as well. Reflection is the essential link between service performed with the lessons learned. Reflection deepens knowledge.

### **Individualized Action Project**

The goal of these manuals is to aid you in designing high quality, high impact culminating projects that not only satisfy the minimum graduation requirement but help you go beyond the minimum in both the learning and the impact that you make. To accomplish this goal, the manuals help you develop an Individual Action Plan.

An Individualized Action Plan (IAP) is the map that will guide you through each step of your culminating project, from research, to selection, to implementation, to presentation. The IAP will offer you, your parents, and your teachers a clear measure of both the goals for your culminating project and progress toward those goals. There are also a number of planning tools that can be used to help design and implement a High Impact Project.

### **GETTING STARTED**

Sometimes getting started is the hardest part of a project. The following 10 steps are provided to help get your thoughts and your project organized. Many of these steps have corresponding Tools that you will find in the Tools Section at the end of this manual.

# Ten Steps for Creating an Individualized Action Project

## 1. Set the Course

The first step is to determine what direction you want your project to take. One of the first questions to ask in getting started is: "What areas are of interest to me?" You will learn more, have greater impact and enjoy the experience more if you are working on something in which you are genuinely interested. So what are you interested in? The High Impact Project Manuals are organized around three broad areas: Environment, Social Justice, and Diversity. Within these broad areas are a number of more specific issues.

ENVIRONMENT	
Recycling	Water Quality
Clean air	Natural Spaces
Pollution Impact	Flowers
Rain Forest	Organic Farming
Logging	Atomic Energy
Endangered Species	Parks
Noise pollution	Fishing
Energy	Transportation
SOCIAL JUSTICE	
Hunger	Poverty
Housing	Fair Trade
Youth Court	Drugs
Youth Violence	Media Literacy
Child Obesity	Homeless
Teen Suicide	Youth in Politics
Peace	Freedom of Speech
Animals	Genetics/Cloning
Education	Child Abuse
Foster Care	Date Violence
DIVERSITY	
Racial	Intergeneration
Gender Equality	Immigration
Cultural Awareness	Faith

If you find an area that interests you on the list, use the corresponding High Impact Project manual that focuses on that theme to move ahead. If your interest is not on the list or in one of the manuals, you can still utilize the 10 Steps model and the planning tools to design and implement your project.

## 2. Understanding the Problem (What Do I Know worksheet)

### **What do I know about this problem?**

There is an old saying, "Don't bother me with the facts, my mind is already made up!" We all have ideas or assumptions about a particular issue in which we are interested. Some of our ideas are correct and are based on facts while some ideas are based on perceptions that are often generally accepted but are not always consistent with the facts. Perceptions can be useful but perceptions, right or wrong, can be persistent. To complicate matters there is a psychological process known as "confirmation bias" in which the brain pays higher attention to information that "confirms" our beliefs than to information that contradicts them. The first step is to identify what you think you know. One of the easiest ways to do this is write down everything you think about a specific issue topic. There is a form in the "Tools" section called "What Do I Know?" worksheet that you can use for this exercise.

### **What are the facts related to this problem?**

Once you have identified what you think you know, it's time to check the facts. It is important to verify the facts to confirm your assumptions and perceptions or, if necessary, to realign your assumptions and shift your ideas to fit the facts. Often, this means recognizing that a problem is much more pervasive than you originally thought. Other times the facts reveal that the issue is not a significant problem locally but it is a serious problem nationally or internationally. But how can you find out if your assumptions are corrects and where can you get the information that you need to solve the problem? There are some valuable resources for checking facts listed on the "Just the Facts" worksheet in "Tools" section for some fact-finding ideas

### **What do I still need to know?**

Once you identified your assumptions and you have determined the general facts regarding your assumptions for your interest area, ask yourself, what else do I need to know in order to develop a service-learning culminating project? You might need to find out all of the organizations that have resources to address your issue area. These might include city, state, or national agencies. It might include

contacting local community-based service organizations. Check the local newspaper for recent articles. Check the library. Get as much information as you can. There are several other questions on the “What Do I Know?” worksheet that will help you refine your thoughts and develop your ideas.

### **3. Talk the Talk**

One of the keys to gathering information is to have good communication skills. There are some tips in the “Tools” section on the “Keys to Communications” worksheet. Every issue and every topic has its own vocabulary. One key to effective communication is to learn the particular vocabulary. Then you will begin to define or interpret the issue or problem using the commonly understood language. Then develop a problem statement that you can use to guide both your research and project.

### **4. Identify Allies**

What is an ally? Ally is defined as a mutually supportive association: to join, or enlist somebody, in an association with one or more other states, organizations, or individuals for mutual help and support or the achievement of a common purpose. Allies will be important in helping you accomplish your goals and will be an important part of a successful project. One of the easiest ways to find allies is to ask a simple question: Who Cares? That is, who else cares about what you care about? Once you identify who else also cares about the topic you have chosen, you have a potential ally. To find potential allies, begin by making an Asset Map of your community agencies that address some aspect of your topic. An asset map is a list of the resources, or assets, that are available in your community. Assets might be organizations or they might be people. Assets can also be natural resources. There is a tool in the Tools section that will help you create an asset map.

## 5. Meet with Leaders

Once you have identified potential assets and allies, then ask: What's already going on? It is time to make agency connections. You can use the Interview Techniques tool and the Interviewing Questionnaire in the Tools section to help guide you through the process of making connections. A good place to begin is by conducting interviews with organizations and agencies that you identified through your asset map as agencies that address the issue or offer resources to meet community needs.

## 6. Know the Rules

All organizations operate with certain rules of procedure, process and order. Communities also have rules of order. You need to know what the rules are if you want to play in the game. You can use the Power Source Chart in the Tools section to get a clearer picture of some of the rules that operate in your community and how those rules affect your project. For example, if you wanted to work on a hunger project and wanted to set up a program that gives out-of-date food, damaged produce or unsold deli items to food banks and shelters, you need to know that there are rules about this process that might make it more difficult to do than you originally thought. Often rules and regulations will affect your project so it is important that you consider the rules.

## 7. Participate in Action

One of the best ways to design a high impact culminating project is first to participate as a volunteer in what we call an Exploratory Service Activity. These exploratory service activities allow you to experience different volunteer opportunities and to gain valuable experience that you can use as you design and implement your culminating project.

Another way to maximize your project's impact is to tie it directly to some national or regional service activity that is already underway, as with an environmental project that joins with other Earth Day activities or a social justice project that connects to a Martin Luther King Jr. National Service Day activity.

Either way, by participating in service opportunities as you are developing your project will strengthen the outcome and the impact.

## 8. Look Ahead

What do you think will happen as a result of your project? This is a process we call forecasting the outcome. It is essentially the goal that you would like to accomplish. You can use the Forecasting the Outcome worksheet to help set your goals and direct your planning.

## 9. Educate Others

The strength of every project is that you have the opportunity to extend the impact of your work as you educate others. Whether this includes an informational awareness campaign or a more elaborate final presentation, the goal is to educate others, especially to educate them to take action. Look for ways to educate your peers, younger students, teachers, family members, and other adults.

## 10. Evaluate

It is always important to reflect on your actions and your accomplishments. In other words, it is important to Assess Your Impact. There are several components to this reflection and evaluation. You can use a simple reflection process known as “What? So What? Now What?” to guide you through the process. You can use the Reflection and Evaluation worksheet in the Tools section for your reflection and evaluation. It also makes a great record of the impact of your experience.





Developed by:  
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This project was made possible through support from:

