Chapter 7

Service Learning Online: Preparing to Work in Global Societies with E-Service-Learning

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ABSTRACT

Using service learning as a form of experiential learning and application of learning objectives has matured to the extent that it has a demonstrated value. There is learning value for the student, and tangible and intangible values for the partnership agency or organization. Those organizations take and apply the work of academia beyond its walls. Online learning has resulted in the development of educational tools of technology to expand the scope of education to diverse and distributed learners beyond the walls of academia. As service learning continues into the millennium, it will apply the expanded scope available through technology tools and the online learning environment to a global context. This chapter describes the expansion of service learning into online learning, presenting two service learning projects that prepared distance learners to work in global and cultural contexts through the technological tools that have become available to distance learners. Moreover, the chapter identifies best practices for the integration of service learning and online learning technological tools available to the experiential learner. This new global learning context will address experiential learning objectives involving cultural awareness and globalization now relevant in the 21st century.

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INTRODUCTION

Online learning has been absorbed and legitimized in the educational context, and can include teambuilding, teamwork, and project completion. Service learning has succeeded in providing students an opportunity to gain the experiential knowledge and skills that they need, and, at the same time, provide critical service to the community. The importance of cultural awareness and globalization has refocused the necessary critical thinking skills and objectives for learning. This chapter describes the expansion of service learning, incorporating two service learning projects that prepared distance learners to work in global, cultural context through the technological tools that have become available to distance learners. The chapter identifies best practices for the integration of service learning and online learning technology tools available to the experiential learning that results in its expansion beyond the local or regional applications of the last two decades. The integration of service learning with the pedagogy of online learning is now at the threshold of global scale and cultural content through the use of technology tools.

BACKGROUND

Service learning is a way to engage students in active learning, and has also flourished over the last 10 years (Bennett, 2001; Celio, 2011). Peer reviewed journals have included articles on service learning and public engagement; however, it appears that, for the most part, there have been very few reported studies of instances involving the intersection of online instruction and service learning, particularly in a global setting. This chapter and the contributions of authors of the succeeding chapters are the pioneers of the vector of that intersection.

Concurrently, online learning has now been absorbed and legitimized in the educational context. Studies over the last 10 years have established that online courses provide learning as well as, if not better than, face-to-face courses (Bernard, 2004). Courses in team building and teamwork are offered in the online environment and project work in teams is utilized extensively in other courses in the online environment. Outside of academia, industry has embraced the power of the technology associated with the Internet, and project meetings and processes are conducted in an online environment without any degradation of productivity or effectiveness. In fact, the online environment actually reduces the expenses of meeting time.
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