SECTION 3: REFLECTION ACTIVITIES

The following strategies are based on Robert Bringle and Julie Hatcher's "Reflection in Service Learning: Making Meaning of Experience" (1999) as well as examples from community college faculty around the country. The activities presented here have been adapted by Diane Sloan, Miami-Dade College, and Toni S. Hartsfield, formerly of Bellevue Community College.

CLASS DISCUSSIONS (STRUCTURED)

This is a technique where faculty create questions to guide group discussion in the classroom. Use structured reflection sessions during regular class time and throughout the course, if all students are involved in service, or modify class discussions if some students are not in service. Students can learn about the diversity of services and populations, see connections between different populations and agencies, collectively share successes and problem-solve challenges at their sites, and learn about societal patterns. For sample reflection questions, see section 2.

CLASS PRESENTATIONS

Class presentations are an effective technique to use during the middle and at the end of a course, and can be designed for individuals or groups. Faculty should have clear and well-defined expectations and criteria for these projects, so students will understand how faculty will evaluate their learning and the quality of the presentations, with emphasis on the former. Students share their learning with peers through a video, slide show, bulletin board, PowerPoint, Web page, panel discussion, or a persuasive speech. This is an opportunity for students to synthesize and summarize their learning over the entire course and connect the classroom knowledge and out-of-classroom learning. It gives students a chance to practice their presentation skills and to display their work in a public format. A similar presentation can be offered to the community agency as a final recognition of the students' involvement.

COMMUNITY MURAL

Creating a mural is a more nontraditional approach to student reflection. This technique enables students to express feelings and learning from the service experience and also allows for a creative collective statement about aspects of an issue facing a community. Murals are excellent final projects for the end of a course, and can be developed in concept and final product over the entire length of the course. Students can use various sources (magazines, newspapers, other art materials) to build their mural. Faculty can use class time or out-of-class time for this work. Faculty need to define well the criteria for evaluation of content, yet allow freedom for means of expression. Display final projects at a community site or on campus. In addition, students may want to create a community mural that can be permanently displayed at an agency or community site.

CONTRACTS AND LOGS

Service learning contracts and logs formalize the learning and service objectives for the course and may be used from the beginning to the end of the coursework. In concert with the faculty and agency supervisor, the student creates a contract that outlines learning and service objectives and identifies the range of tasks to be completed during the service experience, as well as the goals to be achieved and skills to be learned and/or refined. A service log is a continuous summary of specific activities completed and progress towards accomplishing the service learning goals. Students can use the contract and the log to assess their progress toward meeting the identified objectives and reflect on how the experience affected their ability to complete tasks and achieve their goals and objectives. Students could also submit these items as part of a service learning portfolio.

DIRECTED READINGS

Directed readings are additional readings outside of the traditional course textbooks that provide a broader or local context of social responsibility and civic literacy that can be used throughout the course. These readings are a means of enhancing a systemic understanding of societal concerns of students engaged in service. Faculty can use directed readings to challenge students to apply their current knowledge within a discipline to current social needs and current events. Directed readings take all literary forms (newspaper articles, short stories, novels, poetry, essay, etc.) and can become the basis for class discussions or directed writings. Faculty can also allow students to create their own list of directed readings through web searches for key words, such as citizenship, service learning, civic responsibility, individual rights and responsibilities, etc.

DIRECTED WRITINGS

Faculty can use directed writings throughout a course to prompt students to reflect on their service experiences within the framework of course content. The instructor identifies a section from the textbook or class readings (i.e., quotes, statistics, concepts) and structures a question for students to answer (see Sample Reflection Questions in Section 2). Faculty can provide a list of directed writings at the beginning of the course, or distribute it to students as the course progresses. Faculty can also ask students to create their own lists of directed readings/questions based on the course textbooks or materials. Directed writings allow students to analyze course content critically and apply it to current problems and issues.

E-MAIL DISCUSSION GROUPS

Through e-mail, students can create a dialogue with the instructor and peers involved in service projects. This dialogue can be ongoing (weekly) or directed at certain times throughout the course. Students write summaries and identify critical incidents that occurred at the service site. Students can rotate as a moderator of the discussion every two weeks. Instructors can post questions for consideration and topics for directed writings. A log can be printed to provide data about group learnings that occurred from the service experience. Students are able to connect with other students about issues at their sites, help each other solve problems, identify patterns in

their service learning, and have open discussions about societal issues. Faculty may not want to grade content from these discussion groups, but provide incentives for all students to participate.

ESSAYS

Reflective essays are a more formal example of journal entries, and are created via essay questions provided at the beginning of the course. Students are expected to submit a specific number of essays (usually two to three) during the term. Reflective essays can focus on personal development, academic connections to course content, or ideas and recommendations for future action. As with any essay, faculty should clearly state the criteria for development and evaluation of these essays. (Chris Koliba, Georgetown University)

ETHICAL CASE STUDIES

Faculty can require students to create a case study based on their experiences at their service site, and use these case studies in the middle or at the end of a course. The case study should include a description of the context, the individuals involved (respecting confidentiality), and the controversy or event that created an ethical dilemma. Students present their case study to the class, and the class then discusses the situation, identifies the issues, discusses how they would respond to the situation, and gives reasons for their responses. Ethical case studies allow students to analyze a situation, practice ethical decision making as they choose a course of action, and explore and clarify values. (David Lisman, Community College of Aurora)

EXPERIENTIAL RESEARCH PAPER

An experiential research paper, based on Kolb's experiential learning cycle, is a formal paper that asks students to identify a particular experience at the service site and analyzes that experience within the broader context in order to make recommendations for change. Mid-semester, faculty ask students to identify an underlying social issue they have encountered at the service site. Students then research the social issue and read three to five articles on the topic. Based on their experience and library research, students make recommendations for future action. This reflection activity is useful in interdisciplinary courses and provides students flexibility within their disciplinary interests and expertise to pursue issues experienced at the service site. Class presentations of the experiential research paper can culminate semester work. (Julie Hatcher, Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis)

FREE ASSOCIATION BRAINSTORMING

This reflection session takes place right after the end of the first third of the service experience. Students have 10-20 "post-it" notes or cards and write down all of the feelings they had when they first heard about their service learning requirement. Third, they write down all of the feelings they had when they experienced their first "field encounter." Finally, they write down all of the feelings they are having "right now". Encourage them to write down as many different brainstormed thoughts as possible (one thought/word for each card). Students then distribute their post-it cards across three different sheets of newsprint paper posted around the classroom: one sheet with a large happy face, one with a sad face, and one with a bewildered

face. Students should place their cards on the newsprint sheet that matches most closely with their feelings. Then have them stand next to the newsprint in which they posted most of their feelings. Faculty may ask students the reasons why they are standing where they are and what they expect for the remainder of their service experience. This exercise is non-threatening, involves both writing and speaking, and allows for both public and private reflection. (Diane Sloan, Miami-Dade College)

GROUP EXERCISES

Faculty can use the following group exercises throughout their courses, and can create their own variations in order to draw out from students the cognitive and emotional reactions to course content and the service experience.

Fish Bowl

Faculty asks for volunteers (5-7) to be in a circle in the middle of the room. The remaining student form a large circle outside of the inner circle. In essence, students form a set of concentric circles. Faculty provides the inner circle with open-ended questions about content in the class and their service experiences, and encourages students to maintain a discussion. If a student from the outer circle has something to add to the discussion, that student joins the circle and replaces an inner circle student. Important to this reflection technique is a clear set of ground rules (all ideas are respected, replacing a student happens after he or she is done speaking, and there is no talking from the outer circle). This activity allows for students to speak freely about sensitive topics and allows for both internal and external processing, public and private reflection. Faculty may also enlist help from all students in the class for questions to ask the inner circle.

It's My Bag

Students find a bag at home (any bag) and fill it with one (or two, depending on time) item(s) that remind them of how they feel about their service learning project. Students bring the filled bag to the reflection session, and explain their item(s) to the rest of the class. The item(s) that they bring usually turn out to be inspiring visual aids that bring out excellent comments. Students are given a chance to think metaphorically about their experience and connect the abstract with the concrete. (James Wolf, Miami-Dade College)

It's Your Thing/Express Yourself

This reflection exercise is a variation on a class presentation and might take a significant time (several weeks) for students to prepare. Thus, this is a good technique to use as a final project, with checkpoints throughout the course. Students can create the final project as an individual or with a group. If faculty are limited on class time, this works best as small group projects. By using poetry, visual art (paintings, drawings, sculptures), music, individually created games or puzzles, or any other creative outlet, students reflect on their reactions and learning from their service experience. At the end of the course, students "perform" their final work. This exercise allows for the development of creativity, group skills, and challenges students to communicate in nontraditional ways. (Michael and Donna Lenaghan, Miami-Dade College)

Small Group Week
This is a simple alternative to full-class reflection sessions when faculty want students to have a maximum amount of time to talk individually. Divide the class into groups of no more than 10-12 students, and then assign each group to a different day for group reflection. Groups not attending a reflection section can work on out-of-class assignments. Students will feel more comfortable sharing more significant material in smaller groups in a circle, and faculty will glean more substantive content during each session. Students will need a significant amount of time for self-expression as a reaction to faculty-guided questions, and will experience a greater connection between course content and their service experience. (Dave Johnson, Miami-Dade College)

Truth Is Stranger than Fiction
Best used toward the middle and end of a course, this exercise has students divided into groups of no more than three. Faculty ask students to write the most unusual story that happened to them during their service learning experience and to be prepared to share it with their small group at the next class session. At the next class session, have students share their stories in small groups and then come together as a class. Ask representative group members to share some of the stories and what it meant to group members. Open up the discussion to the rest of the class. Faculty should be prepared to prompt students if needed. Students learn valuable writing skills, group communications skills, and have the chance to explore what situations/knowledge affects them. With student permission, faculty can collect stories and "publish" copies for all class members and/or share stories with campus service learning programs to use for community publications and other future needs. (Diane Sloan, Miami-Dade College)

Values Continuum
Faculty can use this exercise to assist students in clarifying their values and exploring the knowledge base for student opinions. This exercise can be used anytime during the course. Name each corner of the classroom as follows: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree. Name the middle of the room as Neutral. Instruct students to go to the place in the room for which they most identify after you read certain statements. Faculty can create questions based on classroom content and/or the service experience. For example, faculty may say, "I believe that individual rights are more important than the rights of the larger community," or "I believe that service to a community is the responsibility of all citizens," or "I believe our government has the responsibility to solve world problems." Once students have gone to their respective places, allow time for students to discuss with other group members their reasons for standing where they are. Have each group report back their reasons for why they believe what they do, and then allow others to "switch" to a different group if they have changed their minds. Continue discussion, and then repeat the process for as long as time allows.

JOURNALS

A common tendency is for journal entries to become a mere log of events rather than a reflective activity in which students consider the service experience in the context of learning objectives. Faculty should guide students to help them link their personal learning with course content. See section 2, Sample Reflection Questions, and section 4, Student and Community Reflections.

Personal Journal
Students write freely about their experience, usually done weekly. Students submit personal journals periodically to faculty, or keep as a reference to use at the end of the experience when putting together an academic essay reflecting their experience. (Julie Hatcher, Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis)

Dialogue Journal
Students submit loose-leaf pages from a dialogue journal bi-weekly (or otherwise at appropriate intervals) for the faculty to read and comment on. While labor intensive for the instructor, this can provide continual feedback to students and prompt new questions for students to consider throughout the course. (Suzanne Goldsmith, 1995)

Highlighted Journal
Before students submit the reflective journal, they reread personal entries and, using a highlighter, mark sections of the journal that directly relate to concepts discussed in the text or in class. This makes it easier for the instructor to identify how the student is reflecting on his or her experience in light of course content. (Gary Hesser, Augsberg College)

Key Phrase Journal
In this type of journal, students must integrate terms and key phrases within their journal entries. The instructor can provide a list of terms at the beginning of the semester or for a certain portion of the text. Students could also create their own list of key phrases to include. Journal entries are written within the framework of the course content and become an observation of how course content is evident in the service experience. (Julie Hatcher, Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis)

Double-entry Journal
When using a double-entry journal, students write one-page entries each week: Students describe their personal thoughts and reactions to the service experience on the left page of the journal, and write about key issues from class discussions or readings on the right page of the journal. Students then draw arrows indicating relationships between their personal experiences and course content. This type of journal is a compilation of personal data and a summary of course content in preparation for a more formal reflection paper at the end of the semester. (Cross and Angelo, 1993)

Critical Incident Journal
In this journal, students analyze a particular event that occurred during the week. By answering one of the following sets of prompts, students are asked to consider their thoughts and reactions and articulate the action they plan to take in the future: Describe a significant event that occurred as a part of the service learning experience. Why was this significant to you? What underlying issues (societal, interpersonal) surfaced as a result of this experience? How will this incident influence your future behavior? Another set of questions for a critical incident journal includes the following prompts: Describe an incident or situation that created a dilemma for you in terms of what to say or do. What is the first thing you thought of to say or do? List three other actions you might have taken. Which of the above seems best to you now and why do you

think this is the best response? (Julie Hatcher, Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis)

Three-part Journal
Students are asked to divide each page of their journal into thirds, and write weekly entries throughout the course. In the top section, students describe some aspect of the service experience. In the middle of the page, they analyze how course content relates to the service experience. And finally, an application section prompts students to comment on how the experience and course content can be applied to their personal or professional life. (Robert Bringle, Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis)

PERSONAL NARRATIVE

Students can construct a personal account of their experience by writing in a narrative form. This allows for students to be creative in telling a story and finding their voice. Faculty could experiment with allowing students to use first or third person and assign a particular audience to whom the students address their comments. Faculty can assign this as an ongoing, midterm, or final project for the course.

PHOTO ESSAY

This is an alternative approach to reflection, which allows students to use their figurative and literal "lenses" to view their service experience and how it relates to the classroom. This is a good final project/presentation technique. Students use photographs to reflect on their service experience and can weave a main theme or concept learned in class to actual photo documents. These projects are also excellent ones to share with the campus community, the service sites, for year-end celebrations, or college and other local publications.

PORTFOLIOS

This type of documentation has become a vital way for students to keep records and learn organizational skills throughout the course, with the submission of the portfolio as a final product at the end of the course. Student portfolios could contain any of the following: service learning contract, weekly log, personal journal, directed writings, and photo essay. Also, any products completed during the service experience (i.e., agency brochures, lesson plans, advocacy letters) should be submitted for review. Finally, students can include a written evaluation essay providing a self-assessment of how effectively they met their learning objectives. Faculty should instruct students to keep content and format professional, as their portfolios are something they can use in job applications and interviews. Students gain organizational skills, a broad list of their skills and abilities, and a final product to use in their life planning and career search.

PUBLICATIONS

Faculty or community partners can assign students to create publications for their service sites, in order to market the agency's services and express the value of service to a community.

This technique may be used mid-course or for a final project. Publications can include Web sites, brochures, newsletters, press releases, newspaper articles, etc.

QUOTES IN PRINT

Faculty can use quotes throughout the course as a means to initiate student reflection. Assign students a page of quotes and ask them to pick one that represents their experience with service learning. Students can then explain why they chose a particular quote. Faculty can assign this as a one-minute paper in class (for reading aloud to the rest of the class upon completion) or as an out-of-class assignment. For examples of relevant quotes see *A Practical Guide for Integrating Civic Responsibility into the Curriculum* (Gottlieb and Robinson, 2002; www.aacc.nche.edu/servicelearning). Additional quotes may be found at http://kirtland.cc.mi.us/~service/quotes/quotes.html and http://www.anselm.edu/volunteer.

QUOTES IN SONGS

Faculty can use this variation on quotes throughout the course. Students find a song in which the singer uses lyrics that describe their thoughts about the service experience. Students may find a whole song or only partial lyrics. If students have access to the song, have them play it at the end of a reflection session, after students have explained why these lyrics relate to their service experience. If students prefer to write their own lyrics for a song, allow this as an option. The class session in which these songs are "performed" usually has a festive atmosphere. Faculty may want to provide "concert souvenirs" or don concert wear to contribute to the spirit of the sessions. (Gwen Stewart, Miami-Dade College)