

The Academic Service Learning Project

Ferris State University Essential Project Elements

Ferris State University administration is supporting an academic service learning (ASL) revitalization and recognition project. All tenured, tenure-track, and adjunct faculty are invited to participate. This sheet gives information about the ASL Project and the course criteria for inclusion. If you would like to be part of this project fill out a Project Expectations Form (which needs to be signed by the indicated administrative officers) and a Course Information Sheet.

Academic Service Learning is a teaching method that incorporates classroom curriculum with community contribution. Students learn and develop through their immersion in thoughtfully organized services that are conducted in and meet the needs of a community. Course objectives are taught through relevant educational experiences while helping to foster civic responsibility, teaching course content and teaching students reflection skills. Academic rigor ought not to be compromised and academic credit in a course is for learning, not for service.

An Academic Service Learning Course needs to have an ASL project that addresses at least one course outcome. Faculty do not need to create a new course or completely overhaul an existing course – unless desired. ASL is used to teach current course content through the use of a project in a service setting. For example, a current course objective may require the ability to conduct an energy audit. Rewording this objective to include *the effect of such audits on those with fixed incomes* provides an opportunity to practice the execution of audits for that targeted population after the appropriate class material is covered. Other examples of projects that may relate to course objectives include: A botany class establishing a rain garden at a local K-12 school, a recreation class designing and implementing a day camp for a local school, or an accounting class helping special populations complete their tax returns.

ASL projects contain five elements:

- 1) Address a community need that is voiced by the community**
Faculty may have an idea of a community project or they can consult with the ASL steering committee which will, as an ongoing process, make connections with local community groups.
- 2) Orient and train students before engaging with the community**
Students should know about the organization or people with whom they will be working before starting the project. This helps avoid major misunderstandings. Students often need to know aspects of the course content before beginning the project. ASL is not learning on the job or by trial and error; it is applying theory or content from the class in real life engagement.
- 3) Engagement by the students in thoughtful and meaningful action**
After developing an appreciation and understanding of a community need, students directly “encounter” that need via the service engagement. The faculty minimize the separation between the student’s community learning role and the classroom learning role and maximize the community responsibility orientation of the course.
- 4) Reflection**
Students must have the opportunity to reflect upon and process their individual learning. Reflection enables students to integrate prior knowledge with new experiences thus creating solid academic connections and consider moral and ethical issues. Activities that encourage reflection include journals, essays, blogs, oral reports, speeches, group presentations, and academic papers.
- 5) Assessment and Evaluation**
Instructors are encouraged to monitor both cognitive and personal growth of learners throughout the project. In addition to tests and quizzes, journaling, oral presentations, writing projects, art projects, reenactments and debates are reputable assessment methods. Course instructors, those being served, and the students, should evaluate the project in terms of the process, procedures, and results for continuous improvement. A course-specific designed instrument, other ASL survey instruments, student satisfaction surveys (beyond the SAI), student anecdotes, or instructor feedback via survey or focus group may be incorporated.