

Bringing Theories to Life: Best Practices in Service Learning

Main Idea

For many different psychology classes, we send our students out into the community to interact with others and identify the human behaviors discussed in class. The benefits to critical thinking and application of theory seem evident to those who teach such courses with service learning components. However, the details of implementing service learning can be overwhelming. Things to consider about incorporating a service component into a class include a) what is the goal of this experience, b) how do we track students' required hours, c) how well do our deliverables allow for students to best explore what they learned, and d) how can we overcome the challenges inherent in adding such coursework?

Questions to ponder:

- 1) What types of courses work well with service learning? What are some challenges to implementing service learning?
- 2) What technology or apps might exist that are useful in supporting the students' service learning experience?
- 3) What are some best practices when assigning students an end of service learning experience deliverable?

Example:

Courses: UT currently has two service learning courses - PSY210 (Child Development) and PSY317 (Adulthood and Aging)

Goals: Combine academic study with volunteer service in the community to link experience with theory and deepen understanding

Tracking Hours: simple sheets that are signed by the agencies

Deliverables: 6 material moments papers (1 page) and 4 larger papers tied to areas of theory (such as cognitive, physical, and social development)

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