



# Developing Service-Learning Scholarship: Actions & Issues to Consider

Source: Sarena D. Seifer, *Community Campus Partnerships for Health*, July 2002, updated February 2008

For additional resources on this and other service-learning topics visit Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse at <http://www.servicelearning.org>.

As service-learning (SL) becomes increasingly widespread in higher education, more opportunities are emerging for SL practitioners to pursue scholarship. This fact sheet provides a brief overview of contemporary issues regarding scholarship in higher education, actions to consider in developing a scholarly agenda in SL, and resources for faculty review, promotion and tenure.

## Contemporary Issues Regarding Scholarship in Higher Education

The challenge for faculty engaged in SL is to describe clearly how accepted standards of scholarship are implemented in the context of community. The principles, processes, outcomes and products of SL scholarship may look very different than scholarship based in a classroom, laboratory or library, but they are informed and guided by the same standards of rigor.

## Developing Service-Learning Scholarship: Actions to Consider

**Make a plan...** Drafting a plan of action will help you to clarify your scholarship priorities. Consider these questions:

- *What are you most passionate about in your SL work? What do you want to know?* Your passion and interests should drive your scholarship priorities. For example, is there a burning intellectual question you hope to answer? A learning objective for your students that you hope to demonstrate is met through SL experiences?
- *What opportunities for scholarship does your work in SL provide?* For example, does your SL course have an evaluation plan that could generate interesting data for a manuscript? Did you design a tool for assessing community partner impact that could be validated and published? Peer-reviewed, evidence-based journal articles are certainly one scholarly product, but also consider editorials and commentaries, descriptive articles, book chapters, "how to" guides, web sites, tools, forms, processes and policies.
- *What professional development might enhance your chances for success?* Take an honest appraisal of your strengths and limitations with respect to SL scholarship, and begin addressing both. For example, do you have the methodological skills to carry out the research project you have proposed? If not, you might consider taking a class, conferring with an experienced colleague, or starting with a pilot project to test and refine your skills.

**Talk to people...**

- *Contact your colleagues* - Find out what scholarship strategies your colleagues utilize. They might give you some creative ideas and/or be able to refer you to other resources.
- *Start within your institution* - Be sure to investigate support for scholarship that may be available within your institution. For example, departmental funds to



attend a research methods workshop, present your work at a conference, or develop a new research proposal.

- *Contact potential journals as you shape your ideas* - Find out what journal editors think of your ideas for a manuscript by asking them. Consider joining forces with a colleague or two to pitch a SL "theme" issue for a particular journal. Be prepared by first reviewing the journal's instructions for authors and past issues to get a sense for the types of articles the journal tends to publish.

***Do some research...*** Before determining the focus of your scholarship, become familiar with the service-learning research literature. Peruse the service-learning literature in your field, discipline or profession.

***Determine who will be involved in the project, how they will be involved, who will be authors and what the order of authorship will be...*** It is important to discuss these issues at the start of any scholarly project. This may be especially true when, as is typical in service-learning scholarship, there will be a number of people involved in the work. Will all project participants be co-authors? Be up-front about your needs and desires.

***Determine how you will protect confidentiality and rights of human subjects...*** Review your institutional review board (IRB) requirements and follow them carefully. Whether IRB review is required or not, it is important to carefully consider how any service-learning scholarship you pursue will protect the confidentiality and rights of participants.

***Be prepared for scholarly opportunities...*** Journals often have short turnaround times for their "requests for manuscripts" for theme issues. If you have an article rejected by a journal, you are likely to revise it and send it on to a different journal. Prepare in advance for these opportunities by keeping background information and citations in readily accessible format.

***Review others' manuscripts to become a better writer...*** The experience of reading and critiquing other people's manuscripts for publication will help you learn to think like a reviewer and to sharpen your own writing skills. Volunteer to be a reviewer for a journal or conference.

***Remember, always follow the instructions for submission...*** Whether you are submitting a manuscript for publication, or a poster proposal for presentation at a conference, you should follow the instructions for submission down to the last detail (i.e., font size, line spacing, receipt or postmark deadline). You run the risk of not having your submission reviewed or of leaving a bad impression no matter how objective the reviewer tries to be in the future.

**Service-Learning Scholarship and the Faculty Review, Promotion and Tenure Process**  
Opportunities for scholarship are essential for the success of faculty in the review, promotion and tenure process. For resources that may assist in leveraging SL research for the RPT process see the expanded version of this fact sheet.

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*For a more detailed discussion, including references and documentation, see the complete online fact sheet at [http://www.servicelearning.org/instant\\_info/fact\\_sheets/he\\_facts/he\\_ops/expanded.php](http://www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/fact_sheets/he_facts/he_ops/expanded.php)*

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