

Service Learning At Saint Peter's
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Service-learning (SL) at Saint Peter's University is an experiential form of learning which brings together academic course curricula, the mission of the University, and the wider community. SL integrates community-based service with the content of academic courses, complementing and enhancing traditional pedagogical methods. In this way, SL generates and strengthens the reciprocity of the relationships between the University and partner organizations, thereby helping to integrate the Jesuit mission of the University within the fabric of the community.

At SPU, SL is driven by active faculty and student involvement and energy. In a service-learning course, students engage in community-based service organized within the framework of the course and guided by the instructor and local partners. The service and the learning inform each other, helping the student to master the course material through a balanced combination of study and active application through service. Structured reflections by the student are essential to this mutual enhancement. Faculty members who teach SL courses also attend training sessions held each year, in order to facilitate the development of their courses as SL courses.

As we begin AY 2014-15, SPU begins the fifth year of its SL program. As a small but steadily growing program, since Fall 2010 over 700 students have participated in the SL program in more than 50 SL-designated courses, taught by faculty members across 17 departments. External partners have been numerous, including Hudson Community Enterprises, A Free Bird (Cancer Kids), ASPIRA, The Food Bank of Hillside, The Hoboken Shelter, Sacred Heart School, Pearson's RED Challenge, and MarbleJam Kids.

Over the last several years of the SL program, the Pearson's (RED) Challenge has been the source of a couple of the many highlights in the SL program. In Spring 2012, a section of *Principles of Marketing* (BA-155) developed an SL-based marketing plan through its participation in Pearson's (RED) Challenge, and a team of students in that section were selected as one among ten national finalists. The following spring, another section of *Principles of Marketing* were successful in having another top-ten finish.

Other highlights include the *Bridging Theory To Practice* grant, which the SL program shared in winning in early 2013. The SL portion of the grant funded a luncheon, and invitees included selected SL faculty, administrators, and the directors and primary contacts of several external partners the SL program has worked with. Attendees learned more about the SL program, and enjoyed a faculty presentation on a recent SL project involving SPU's partnership with MarbleJam kids. This illustrated how much the SL experience contributes to the education of our students and to the wider community.

In addition, in the past two years, two different SL sections in the sociology department have produced a running blog documenting these sections' exploring inequalities in healthcare. The blog can be found at <http://healthandinequalities.wordpress.com/>

As these and many other recent SL examples show, in addition to providing a new way to optimize the student learning experience, service-learning fosters compassion and the development of leadership skills. As well, service-learning encourages students to commit themselves to long-term civic engagement as adult citizens who are agents of positive change and justice.

The service-learning program at Saint Peter's University is primarily based in Academic Affairs, but also coordinates its activities and goals with the Office of Community Service and with Student Affairs in order to enable students, faculty, and community partners to build service-learning experiences that are as rewarding, educational, and mutually beneficial as possible.

For more information on the SL program, please contact Daniel Murphy at dmurphy2@saintpeters.edu.