

## Part Four: Getting the Most Out of Your Service

Working in a new environment can be exciting, interesting and incredibly rewarding. Students who become actively engaged in the environment and processes of their service learning placement can find themselves gaining rich learning experiences that cannot be obtained within the context of a classroom. With that in mind, students can enhance their service-learning experience by:

### Completing Reflection Logs, Journals, and In-Class Assignments

Throughout the service-learning experience, it is important to thoughtfully reflect on your experience in relationship to the course content. Through this thoughtful reflection on service activities, the community-based organization, and those with whom you serve, each service-learning student will bring to the course a unique perception from which she/he will be considering course concepts. When these viewpoints are combined, an interestingly complex view of the entire subject area will emerge, allowing you as the learner to see subject content in a variety of ways.



With that said, however, it is important to avoid “missing the forest for the trees.” Often students focus on their task within the community setting without looking the larger social context. For example, a student who serves as an academic tutor and mentor should consider the child’s role is within the context of their family, the educational system, and society What social pressures are placed on children? How are they taught to behave? What kind of affect/influence do you think your involvement with this child might have had? How can your service activity continue to influence the child after your time together is over? What are the societal implications relating to the tutoring/mentoring of children, particularly if you are addressing a specialized topic (for example, science, computer technology, art)? The answers to these types of questions can speak volumes within the contexts of child development, psychology, sociology, family and consumer sciences, and educational psychology courses, among others. Keep your eyes open when you perform your service, the chapters of your textbook may be unfolding before you.

In service-learning courses, assignments are structured to allow connections to be made between your experience in the real world setting and what you are learning from course documents and lectures.

Critically examine what you have read in your text with what you are experiencing. Are there contradictions or consistency? Was there something you were not previously aware of before your placement experience? Were you able to observe a fundamental aspect of your course within the community setting? All of these topics can be addressed within your course assignments. Active participation in class discussions and through other means can significantly increase your understanding of the subject at hand. Don’t be afraid to speak up, you may have a new and interesting perspective!

*“[The most effective reflection] is what we are doing now for this communication theory course. It is by going out, experiencing and then coming back and writing about it and talking about it within your group. And then talk about it in front of the classroom. Because then, it like pounds it into your head... Okay, I can talk about it; I can write about it; I know it inside and out. So that’s the most positive reflection I think.”*

*—University of San Diego Student  
(A Practitioner’s Guide to Reflection in Service-Learning)*

*Students “become more involved in their communities, link theory to practice, and become more cognizant of true-to-life issues...”*

*—Dr. Acosta-Deprez, Health Science*