

Ensuring the Safety of Students, Faculty and Community During Service-Learning: The Silliman University Experience

Deborah Mae C. Salem
*Department of Psychology,
Silliman University*

Service-Learning at Silliman University began in year 2000 with the approval of a Service-Learning proposal written by Dr. Enrique G. Oracion submitted to the United Board of Christian Higher Education in Asia (UBCHEA) through the International Partnership for Service-Learning (IPSL) and the formation of Silliman University Center for Extension and Development (SUCED). The initial service-learning had a multidisciplinary approach conducted at Maluay, Zamboanguita. This was participated in by Social Work and Sociology-Anthropology Departments of the College of Arts and Sciences, College of Business Administration, and the College of Nursing (Delfin, 2002). Currently, more academic units of the university have become actively involved in service-learning. Their activities are coordinated by the Institute of Service-Learning with its director Prof. Emervencia L. Ligutom.

Having more academic units involved in service-learning means more students and teachers are going out to the community to serve and learn, and more communities in Dumaguete City and in the province of Negros Oriental are getting involved in hosting these students. To add to this growing number of Silliman University students are international students coming in from various universities in Asia and America. The number of international students is growing as more and more universities are partnering with Silliman University in service-learning.

The need to ensure the safety of the students and their teachers as well as the communities where they serve and learn is a priority of the units involved in the program. This paper presents some of the best practices of some service-learning units in the university.

Keywords: Risks, Risk management, Safety

INTRODUCTION

Service-learning as a pedagogy is known to positively impact students exposed to it. Some positive impacts are on the area of personal, social growth of students, academic performance, sense of social responsibility, and commitment to service (Eyler & Giles, 2001; Berle, 2006). Because of the benefits of service-learning to the learner, more and more schools are using this pedagogy as evidenced by the 2012-2013 Annual report of Campus Compact. Dr. James B. Dworkin Chancellor of Purdue University North Central and Chair, Campus Compact wrote:

Dear Friends, Campus Compact forged ahead with an exceptionally busy agenda in 2012-2013. Our network of more than 1,110 college and university presidents and chancellors along with our 34 network affiliate offices worked together to create lasting impact on campuses and in communities through innovative programs and initiatives centered on civic engagement. Campus Compact had a membership of more than 900 colleges and universities in 2002.

In the Silliman context, growth of service-learning is evidenced by the number of academic units employing service-learning as a pedagogy.

SERVICE-LEARNING AT SILLIMAN UNIVERSITY

In 2002, the first service-learning activity was conducted in Maluay, Zamboanguita. The service-learning activity was multi-disciplinary and was participated in by five academic units of the university namely: Social Work Department, Sociology – Anthropology Department, Medical Department of the College of Arts and Sciences, College of Business Administration, and College of Nursing.

Today, there are about 18 academic units in Silliman that field their students in the community to serve and learn. In addition to these students are the international students from different universities in Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Thailand, and the United States. These students chose to do their service-learning in the communities of Dumaguete City and Negros Oriental under the supervision of Silliman's Institute of Service-Learning.

As the number of students going to the community to serve and learn increased, the the responsibility to ensure the safety of the students and other stakeholders, the faculty, and the community also increased. One has to only scan through different schools' service-learning manuals to appreciate how the issue of risk management is addressed as a priority, to ensure the safety of those involved. According to Joyce and Ikeda (2002), while risks cannot be totally eliminated, having a clear understanding of potential risks and liabilities is a first in developing safe service programs.

Applying to this paper are the definitions of risk management and risks from Risk Management Guidelines for Community Interaction of Stellenbosch University, South Africa (2009):

- Risk Management is “the process whereby an organization (HEI) establishes its risk management goals and objectives, identifies and analyses its risks, and selects and implements measures to address its risks in an organized fashion;”
- Risks are “the possibility of loss, injury, disadvantage or destruction” categorized at different type or level: people, property, income, and goodwill;
- Safety is ensured when risks are eliminated or minimized. The following are practices of some units of Silliman University to ensure the safety of their students, faculty, and the community where the students serve and learn.

Ensuring Safety for International Service-Learners

Student profile. Prior to coming to Silliman, the international students submitted a personal profile to the Institute of Service-Learning. The profile included the students' area of interest, health issues if any, and dietary restrictions. Knowing some important information about the student made it possible for all involved to take proper measures to ensure the students' safety. For example, a student from Bangkok University student was not any ordinary student as she was the wife of the Timor Leste ambassador to Thailand.

Matching students and partner agencies enables the students to be in a community that suits their area of interest. The time spent in commuting is also reduced, thus providing the student more safety.

Moreover, there are pre-arranged sites where safety is a consideration and where supervisors are assigned.

Host families. Site supervisors pick out the potential host families since they are more familiar to the people in the community. The service-learning team evaluates the location and the family, assessing for potential risks. Once approved, the family, if new to the program, is given an orientation about the program and corresponding expectations.

In the article, *Internationalization of the Higher Education Classroom: Strategies to Facilitate Intercultural Learning and Academic Success* (as cited in Crose, 2011), Summers and Violet (2008) suggested creating peer-pairing programs with international students and host students, to assist and help the international students become familiar with the campus environment.

In Silliman University, we call it the buddy system where a Silliman student who is also a service-learner acts as a buddy to one or more international students. He/she accompanies the international student throughout the duration of his/her stay. The buddy acts as an interpreter, cultural guide, and a co service-learner. Currently, buddies come from the social work and psychology department.

Pre-community orientation. When the international students arrive on campus, they go through a pre-community engagement orientation. The pre-community engagement orientation includes a courtesy call to the University President or Vice-President for Academic Affairs; identification card application; campus tour; and an orientation program where the students meet with the service-learning core team who will act as facilitators during the reflection sessions. The students are also introduced to agency representatives, host families, and their Silliman buddies. It is during the orientation program that expectations and community activities are discussed.

Service-learning kit. Each international service-learner is provided with a kit which contains orientation materials, basic Cebuano terms and greetings, write-up of the different agencies, maps of Dumaguete and Negros Oriental, and important telephone numbers.

Field monitoring. On a set date, the service-learning core team visits the service-learners in the field. This allows the team to check on the students, and address issues and problems students have to deal with.

Ensuring Safety for Silliman University Service-Learners

Orientation to service-learning is done at the start of the semester along with the orientation to the course. Discussed during the orientation are the expectations, requirements, activities, and rules to be followed and different agency sites.

Contact information sheet. Some units require students to fill out this sheet which draws out important information about the students, their course advisers, and their site supervisors. This form also contains information such as contact numbers, email addresses, and ways of reaching them when the need arises.

Students going to the communities should go in pairs or in small groups and never alone. Advisers and site supervisors are aware of the schedules when students are expected to be in the communities. Some units require the faculty advisers to be with the students every time they go to the community. Examples of these units are the College of Nursing, Institute of Clinical Laboratories, and Socio-Anthropology Department. On the other hand, some units allow their students to go the field in pairs or groups without the adviser on their re-arranged time. A previously arranged site supervisor looks into the activities with the adviser who conducts spot checks. The units that follow this scheme are Departments of Social Work and Department of Psychology. These units field service-learners in different sites simultaneously, hence the need for the advisers to rotate spot checks.

Transportation. Although some schools with service-learning program stress in their reminders to teachers not to arrange travel for students (California State University, 2002; Suffolk University, 2008; Weber State University, n.d.), practices of some units in Silliman University require all students and their advisers to travel together in a transport arranged by the adviser. No student travels in their private vehicles. This may be due to the collectivist orientation of Filipino teachers, which brings about the need to take care of the students and travel with them in the same vehicle to and from the community. On the other hand, some units allow their students to travel in groups without their teachers to the service-learning sites. A recent memo from the university administration states that vehicles that transport students to off-campus activity sites have to be approved by the Buildings and Ground supervisor. This measure is to further ensure that students travel on road-worthy transportation to the communities.

Introduction to the agency and community. Students are introduced to the agency and to the community before the commencement of service-learning. Courtesy calls to town and barangay officials are done every time a new batch of service-learners are introduced to the community. This standard procedure, while it strengthens the relationship of the community and the Institution, helps ensure the safety of service-learners in the community since local officials and residents are aware of the service-learners' presence in the community.

Presence of faculty adviser /clinical instructor. There is no doubt that the presence of a faculty adviser/clinical instructor in the field with the students help ensure the students safety. When service-learners perform a procedure as part of the program for the community, the supervision of a clinical instructor assures the accuracy of the procedure, thus protecting the student and members of the community. The presence of the faculty adviser also ensures that potential problems are immediately addressed. In Silliman another scheme is also applied by some units. Service-learners are fielded simultaneously in different communities and are supervised by a previously identified site supervisor, quite often but not always, the head of the agency. The service-learners are able to implement planned activities under their supervision while the faculty adviser conducts spot checks, covering as many communities as possible. Under this scheme, the site supervisor and the faculty adviser have to be in close coordination with each other through regular conferences to ensure the success of the program.

Ensuring the Safety of the Faculty

A successful service-learning program would require thorough understanding and preparation of service-learning on the part of the faculty. When a service-learning activity is prepared well, not only would it assure success but also the safety of the faculty adviser as well.

At Silliman, there may be a variety of ways in doing service-learning, but despite variety, all units have to accomplish prerequisites to implementing this pedagogy in the course. The following are prerequisites.

First, the course outline/syllabus should reflect that the course has a service-learning component. It should also be indicated whether the service-learning component is required or voluntary. To be able to avail

of the fund from the university, a service-learning module has to be submitted to the Institute of Service-Learning also prior to initiating the activity.

Second, the students are oriented to the service-learning pedagogy at the start of the semester. As some units practice, having a service-learning handout to serve as guide is very helpful to the students as they go through the experience. The handout should contain important information about the service-learning component such as the objectives, number of hours, activities, service-learning sites, academic requirements, behavioral expectations in the field, grading system, and weight of this component in the overall grading or assessment of the course.

Third, students should submit a filled out and signed parents' consent form, and an off-campus activity permit before commencing service-learning activities. The off-campus activity permit is accomplished by the faculty adviser.

Fourth, service-learning sites have to be pre-arranged by the faculty adviser, and there should be an agreement with the community or agency and the unit fielding the students. One of the important considerations for choosing a site is the safety of the students who will be serving there. For some units, should a student wish to do service-learning in an agency and not in the pre-determined sites on the list, the agency must first be approved by the faculty adviser. Only then can a student serve and learn in the new site.

Fifth, while service-learning engagement is on-going, the faculty adviser holds regular reflection sessions with students. These regular reflection sessions help the faculty adviser to evaluate students' progress, address issues, and guide students with decisions they need to make. The reflection sessions enable the students to make sense of their experience and learn from it.

Sixth, students are required to submit reflection activities such as journals and term papers. Conferencing and journal writing are forms of reflection activities. One cannot overlook the importance of reflection activities in service-learning. As Dwight Giles and Janet Eyler stated "Reflection is... 'the hyphen between service-learning'" (as cited in Rice, n. d.). Educator, Paulo Friere also stated, "...Reflection without action is verbalism, action without reflection is activism" (as cited in Rice, n. d.).

Ensuring Safety of the Community

The last stakeholder of the service-learning activities are the communities where the students serve and learn. The communities vary depending on the nature of the service-learning and the course of the service-learners. Some communities include rural areas or barangays, urban poor communities, and government or non-government institutions to name some. Wherever the students serve and learn, the people they come in contact with provide vital learning experiences, and the welfare of these people have to be protected. The following are some measures implemented by units conducting service-learning to ensure the safety of the community.

Prior to the engagement, the faculty adviser makes arrangements with communities where students will conduct service-learning activities. A needs analysis is conducted, and activities to meet the needs are discussed and agreed upon. The time frame is laid out so the communities will be aware of the beginning and end of such engagement. For some units a memorandum of agreement with the community is drafted.

Students are then oriented to the community and behavior expectations are articulated in the classroom before the students go out to the sites. If the class size is large, there may be a need to have several service-learning sites to control the number of students going to a specific community and avoid flooding the community with service-learners. The faculty adviser has the discretion regarding the the number of students assigned in each community; in some cases, the limit is stipulated by the community or agency.

Sensitivity to the uniqueness of the community is also very important and the choice of students have to be considered. A case in point is the Casa Esperanza. Casa Esperanza is a facility that houses sexually abused women and children. It does not allow male service-learners. Therefore, the faculty adviser has to provide other communities for the male service-learners while allowing female service-learners interested in working with these women and children to be fielded in this community.

Getting feedback from community is done during the course of the service-learning engagement. The faculty adviser has to monitor the development of the engagement, and assess the relationship of the service-learners and the community. Reciprocity should be assured in any community engagement.

At the end of each community engagement, all stakeholders come together to evaluate the activity. Have the objectives of the engagement been met? Are all stakeholders satisfied with the outcome of the engagement? Are there new needs identified? Is there a need for further engagement? Planning for the succeeding exposures, should there be any, must integrate what was brought up in the evaluation. The end of a community engagement is a time to celebrate what has been accomplished. A time for celebration brings the stakeholder closer as they celebrate the joint effort towards the goal that has been accomplished.

LESSONS LEARNED AND CHALLENGES TO BE ADDRESSED

Service-Learning at Silliman is gaining momentum and will continue to do so as more units in the university appreciate the merits of the pedagogy and use it in their courses, and as more International institutions link with the university for this engagement.

To be more effective, challenges have to be identified and addressed. Thus, the following are challenges that have been identified.

1. While the buddy system works very effectively for international service-learning, changes in the Social Work curriculum has made it difficult to develop a pool of buddies to accompany the growing number of international service-learners coming in for engagement. This school year, Psychology students enrolled in the Certificate in Service-Learning have joined the pool of buddies, but there is still a need to increase this pool as more and more international service-learners are coming in for the experience. There is also a constant need for a new supply of buddies as the older ones would complete their education and graduate. Increasing the pool of buddies protect the buddies from getting overwhelmed by the number of engagements since having a pool gives them a choice on which group or groups of international students to assist. Increasing the pool of buddies would also mean that more Silliman University students will be able to have this rich cultural experience. As noted in the experience of previous buddies, friendships formed last even beyond their college days.

2. Service-learning practices are not uniform throughout the units implementing the pedagogy. Should there be uniform implementation of the pedagogy? Or should there only be an orientation manual to articulate the guiding principles of service-learning that all units could adhere to while maintaining their uniqueness? The Institute of Service-Learning coordinates all the field activities of students in the university. The institute should make sure that all units operate within the articulated guiding principles. An example of this coordination is the Post Typhoon Sendong service-learning conducted in a severely affected barangay in Valencia. The affected barangay was Palinpinon. A multi-disciplinary service-learning was coordinated by the Institute of Service-Learning. The participating units were identified based on the need of the barangay. The entrance and exit of the units were coordinated by the institute to protect the community from being overwhelmed by the students' presence.
3. With the growing number of service-learners going to the communities, more communities have to be identified.
4. While partner fora allow the communities and partner agencies to articulate their involvement/contribution to the program, how else can they be made more involved? More involvement by the community would add to the enrichment of the engagement.

The challenge to ensure the safety of the stakeholders of service-learning will always be there and should always be addressed. Only when risks are eliminated or minimized can the stakeholders have a sense of safety, allowing interaction and relationship to deepen and creating a healthy environment to serve and learn.

REFERENCES

- Berle, David. (2006). Incremental integration: A successful service-learning strategy. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 18 (1), 43-48 [http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/California State University. \(2002\). Best practices for managing risk in service-learning](http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/California State University. (2002). Best practices for managing risk in service-learning).
- Cröse, B. (2011) Internationalization of the higher education classroom: Strategies to facilitate intercultural learning and academic success. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://www>.

isetl.org/ijtlhe/

Delfin, E. (2002). *Silliman Journal*.

Dworkin, J. (2013). Annual report-campus compact. Retrieved from <http://www.compact.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/2013-Annual-Report-FINAL1.pdf>

Joyce, S. A., Ikeda, E.K.(2002). *Serving safely: A risk management resource for college service programs*. San Francisco, CA: California Campus Compact. Management for service-learning faculty. (n. d.). Retrieved from

Rice, K. (n. d.). *Engaging all partners in reflection: Designing and implementing integrative reflection opportunities*.

Risk management Guidelines for Community Interactions for Staff Members. Stellenbosch University, South Africa (2009). Retrieved from http://admin.sun.ac.za/gi/risk/Bylae%20B_Risikobestuursriglyne.pdf

Risk management, liability, and safe service-learning. (n. d.). Retrieved from <http://www.weber.edu/wsuiimages/ccel/docs/workshops/risk-management.pdf>

Service statistics: Highlights of campus compact's annual membership survey. (2002). Retrieved from http://www.compact.org/wp-content/uploads/about/statistics/2002/2002_Statistics.pdf

Suffolk University. (2002). *Service learning risk management manual*. Retrieved from http://blogs.cas.suffolk.edu/servicelearning/files/2008/03/risk_mgmt_manual.pdf

Weber State University. Study Abroad Programs. Retrieved from http://www.weber.edu/ppm/Policies/4-11_StudyAbroad.html