

Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

Connecting to Course Content Through Group Community Service Project

Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

Students work on a community service project during the last third of the semester. The instructor starts this activity by engaging the entire class in a discussion about connecting the theory covered in the course to what it might look like in practice and to the importance of community work. During this conversation, students brainstorm community organizations that are doing service work. After identifying projects and/or organizations in the community that they can support, students form groups of three or four based on common interests. Example projects include helping with cleanup and other services at a local restaurant that feeds homeless people or tidying up shelves and clearing boxes at a local thrift store.

After finishing the project, each group creates a short abstract that outlines the work done and how it relates to an aspect of the coursework. This outline is the basis for a PowerPoint or poster presentation each group makes to the rest of the class addressing their experiences of giving back to the community. The groups submit their abstracts to the instructor prior to the presentation. Each group member must deliver part of the presentation. Following the presentation, the rest of the class asks questions and provides feedback.

After all presentations are completed, the instructor facilitates a large-group discussion about students' overall experiences, asking how their experiences with this project connect to their coursework and how it connects to students' beliefs, self-values, and ethics. Finally, each group writes a brief summary of the experience and thoughts on their presentation to the instructor. Students are also required to do peer assessments of their group members, evaluating the effort and quality of each group member's contribution.