slihe

Recommendations for Promoting and Strengthening Service-learning in European Higher Education and Good Practice Examples

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Project partners

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SLIHE team is happy to present recommendations for further promotion and strengthening of service-learning pedagogy in higher education institutions in Europe. Recommendations have been developed by joint initiative and engagement of project participants from universities from six different partnering countries - Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Romania and Slovakia - with the aim of promoting service-learning as teaching and learning pedagogy in European higher education area.

Recommendations are developed targeting several key stakeholder groups: (I) university, faculty, department management, (II) faculty/teaching staff, (III) students, (IV) community organisations, and (V) relevant national and European stakeholders in higher education.

Recommendations are evidence-based and have been developed on the basis of some of the key project activities:

- Experiences obtained from project partners in the process of creating and testing outputs from SLIHE project (two manuals "Service-learning in Higher Education - Curriculum of Training for Teachers in Service-learning and Handbook for Trainers" plus "Service-learning for Teachers in Higher Education").

- Observations obtained by the project partners during the process of training faculty staff and providing mentoring support.

- Recommendations gathered through various multiplying events - organised workshops and panel sessions at higher education conferences (e.g. European Conference on Service-learning in Higher Education).

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Service - learning in Higher Education (further on in the text - SL)
Recommendations for university // faculty // departmental management

- Acknowledge the SL as an innovative community-based teaching & learning strategy and pedagogy in relevant university strategic documents, particularly those related with the quality of teaching, as well as with teaching-research connectedness (SL as a model of applied teaching and research).

- Develop the strategy of SL integration in HE teaching and make connections with institutional strategic directions.

- Motivate faculty/departmental management to include SL in their own strategic documents.

- Include SL in the public statement/values of the University: Making a public statement of the University about the ways the "Third Mission" can be accomplished, with clear presentation of the benefits of SL pedagogy for the University, students and community.

- Create an office/centre for SL management/activities - international examples point to the importance of such a central place for coordinating various activities related to the successful SL integration (e.g. placement of students, crediting of SL activities, liaisons with the community partners). At least one full-time position for the coordination of SL activities is recommendable.

Service - learning in Higher Education

Recommendations for university // faculty // departmental management

· Provide continuing professional development for HE teachers - as an innovative teaching and learning pedagogy, SL needs to be taught and by creating systemic educational opportunities, university is investing in creating a community of SL and engaged teachers.

· Facilitate and enable the cooperation between different faculties and/or departments - SL projects can be developed as interdisciplinary and therefore collaboration between teachers of various disciplinary backgrounds is desirable.

· Secure professional assistance for teachers who want to transform their regular teaching classes using the SL model/pedagogy (e.g. assistance in the development of the curriculum, provide models / templates, provide national and global examples of good practices and recommendations for SL activities, experienced peers as mentors).

· Provide more frequent and more context-oriented SL training to students.

· Increase the flexibility of the curricula for allowing the (full) integration of SL components.
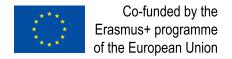
Service - learning in Higher Education

Recommendations for university // faculty // departmental management

- Set up university/institutional policies for marking SL courses and for the calculations of working teaching norm - SL courses could be administered with a certain SL code in the curriculum/study programme so that students know the nature of the particular course when they are selecting elective courses, and SL courses could be administered with the higher norm for teaching (e.g. if 2 hours is for regular teaching, make 2.5 for SL courses).

- Involve SL as an indicator of teaching quality in the evaluation process/forms - evaluation of SL courses as part of the internal system of quality assurance (students' evaluations) - e.g. include in evaluation forms questions on interactive teaching methods, on embeddedness of non-formal teaching methods, their satisfaction with the outcomes fulfilment.

- Inclusion of SL in the self-evaluation annual criteria/reports for academics.

- Set adequate/various incentives and rewarding systems to promote an incentive policy for teachers who integrate SL and interactive teaching methods in their teaching as a way to acknowledge their dedicated engagement in creating community-based platforms for students' teaching and learning.

- Create funding schemes to support research in SL and publishing paper in specialised journals, and present to the teachers the possibility of doing applied research in SL and chances of accessing funds for research grants, e.g. HORIZON 2020.
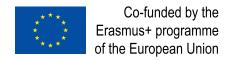
Service - learning in Higher Education

Recommendations for university // faculty // departmental management

- Develop an online platform that could serve as a database for relevant information on teachers engaged in SL courses - such a database could serve as an introduction point for various community stakeholders to get to know university teachers interested in developing collaboration with community organisations.

- Monitor the quality of university-community partnerships, and of students' engagement in the community with the aim to make the impact of SL more visible in the context of university contribution to the local/ regional development (use it as a PR indicator).

- Monitor SL courses/projects and celebrate their success, e.g. organise once per academic year an event like University SL Day/Festival with the aim to network students, teachers, NGOs and various community members engaged, and to make SL projects at the university more visible (media coverage, coverage via social media).

- Research shows it is beneficial at the faculty/department level to hold events with teachers at the end of each academic year, reflecting upon their experience, particularly at their SL experience and start building together ideas on how to improve teaching at the department/institutions, promoting SL as one mechanism that can improve teaching quality.

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Service - learning in Higher Education
Recommendations for HE teachers // academics (teaching staff)

Recommendations related with own professional development

- If you are not an experienced teacher in SL, it is strongly recommended to engage in educational workshops on SL

- There are specialised (international) journals on SL and various community-based pedagogies - build upon your knowledge following recent research and case studies

- If there are no opportunities for SL professional development at your institution, see if there are any experienced colleagues using SL in your disciplinary area and connect with them

- If you are already an experienced teacher in SL, offer mentoring to other teachers/colleagues who are just starting using SL. The continuous reflection on SL experience on a meta level can contribute in developing a "scientific mindset" of SL being a model for integrating both applied teaching and research

Service - learning in Higher Education
Recommendations for HE teachers // academics (teaching staff)

Recommendations related with the course and the integration of SL

- If you are just starting the SL, follow the 'less is more' and/or 'small is beautiful' strategies, meaning start with elective courses and/or small assignments, or with a hybrid version (e.g. combining online and field work) until you build up your experience.

- Educating about the SL might assist in increasing your awareness about the distinctions between SL and other types of community-based activities.

- Take your time to get well acquainted with the role of reflection in SL courses as it is the crucial element that transforms students' experience into a meaningful learning lesson

- Plan your course(s) in detail, particularly students' engagement; If you have such options, research points to an ideal structure of combining two semesters (e.g. theoretical preparation in one semester and SL project implementation in the second one).

Service - learning in Higher Education
Recommendations for HE teachers // academics (teaching staff)

· Exchange SL ideas and projects within certain thematic areas and/or geographical areas and make exchange of such projects in an interdisciplinary manner - the idea is to extend collaboration, not to isolate your SL courses/projects within disciplinary fields only

· It is beneficial, particularly if you are a newcomer to the SL pedagogy, to join forces with other colleagues in creating a SL project. You can work together with colleagues from your own department and/or discipline or with those from other disciplines, which might bring in the multi-perspective approach to the chosen topic/SL project.

· Bear in mind that the (traditional) role of teacher transforms within the SL project and your role is more in line with being coordinator, facilitator and/or mentor.

· Evaluate the course constantly and (re)design it accordingly.

· The impact of your SL project can also be accompanied by a research (longitudinal study) that you can publish in many journals specialised for community-based pedagogy.
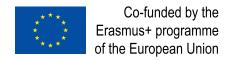
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Service - learning in Higher Education
Recommendations for HE teachers // academics (teaching staff)

Recommendations related with students

- Help your students to create the learning mindset for SL. Students might have various volunteering experiences, but SL is a particular pedagogy that connects curriculum and learning outcomes with their own engagement. Presenting them the SL pedagogy at the very beginning of the course is of great importance.

- Besides being a teacher, your role within the SL course/ project is that of a coordinator, facilitator and/or mentor. Guide your students and provide them with all the support needed. Bear in mind that some students need more guidance than others, particularly during the reflection(s) assignments. The same is important to keep in mind when matching students with community partners.

- Students often have high expectations and are usually very idealistic when they start SL projects. It is important to openly communicate with them the real possibilities in addressing a certain issue. Explain to your students the complexities in having a high impact on the community within a semester, even two. Work with them on 'planting a SL seeds', and explain possibilities of follow-up projects with community organisations, if such are an option.

Service - learning in Higher Education
Recommendations for HE teachers // academics (teaching staff)

- Track both the academic and the social success of students participating in SL courses/projects. Try to engage your alumni students, especially if they end up working in organisations/institutions that align well with your courses.

- If you are a newcomer to the SL pedagogy, it might be useful to work together with other colleagues and share the responsibility of facilitating the whole process, and particularly for consulting students.

- Invite teachers/colleagues to your SL field work, let them witness what students can do when they're engaged in such a manner.

- Help students in understanding the distinction between SL and other types of community-oriented activities. It is necessary to explain the distinctions between SL and volunteering, but also about the transition possibilities from volunteering to SL.

- Raise awareness among students about the importance of cooperation. It is important for them to learn how to cooperate with different stakeholders. Different generations might have different expectations. Some students/participants may be more experienced than others, which might be challenging in organising the SL course.

- Provide students with both national and international examples of SL courses/projects in higher education.

Service - learning in Higher Education
Recommendations for HE teachers // academics (teaching staff)

· Raise awareness among students about the transferability of knowledge and skills. Let the students know through reflective methods that they can transfer the knowledge gained through SL to other areas, such as personal and professional development.

· Offer students space for building their own responsibility. Remind students that they are key factors in SL project and that teachers are there to guide and support them.

· Develop a feasible plan of the SL project, set realistic goals, follow a plan, and let students know about the importance of completing all the tasks on time. Discuss with the students that their personal commitment and team communication is critical to the success of the project.

· Create a realistic timeframe and expectations in terms of time investment for the SL project. Students should not underestimate the time and energy they need to invest in a SL project. Even though in the beginning of the SL project, students show enthusiasm towards group projects in which they can connect the theory with practice, for some of them, however, SL is time-consuming.
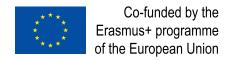
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Service - learning in Higher Education

Recommendations for HE teachers // academics (teaching staff)

· Avoid overloading the students with too many SL projects. Implementing SL opens discussion about coordination between courses included in a study program. Without clear procedures and time management strategies, it is not possible for each course to have a SL component. At some point, students might feel overwhelmed and start to be less productive and motivated.

· Discuss with the students about the (social) networks that can be developed through SL courses/projects and the benefits they can gain, as SL opens various doors to engage with different community partners, and some of them might be their future employers.

· Openly discuss with students the possibilities of encountering difficulties in the process of SL, and let them know whom to talk to when they find themselves in challenging situations.

· Bear in mind that one of the most important elements in motivating students for joining SL projects is actually you. Research points out that a university teacher's personality, alongside his/her motivation, own civic engagement, contacts within the community and enthusiasm plays a very important role.

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Service - learning in Higher Education
Recommendations for HE teachers // academics (teaching staff)

Recommendations related with community partners (organisations, institutions, companies, local authorities…)

· Dedicated community partners are very important for the successful SL projects, so it is of crucial importance to know who you're going to work with. Get to know potential community partners, their possibilities and challenges.

· If you don't have any kind of institutional support in finding appropriate community partners, try using your own experience in the field, networks, snowball-effect, as well as students' suggestions.

· Explain differences between volunteering, practice/ working placement and SL - it is important for community organisations to know the difference so they can have different expectations about their own role as well as students' role and their capacity.

· Try to provide educational opportunities for your partnering organisations so they can learn more about the SL pedagogy.

· Provide partnering organisations with both national and international examples of SL courses/projects in higher education.

· Engage your community partners in needs assessment, planning the course, and particularly in planning students' assignments.

Service - learning in Higher Education
Recommendations for HE teachers // academics (teaching staff)

- Clarify expectations and aims since they might differ from the original idea of Service Learning (it is not a free service on the part of the university), but also the necessary degree of involvement which might be higher than expected, especially considering the temporal expenditure.

- Discuss time schedule as the rhythm of the academic year does not necessarily fit with the organisational schedule.

- Make sure you have a contact person in the partnering organisation for all matters of concern, both for you and your students.

- It is important to have constant working communication. If a SL project fails, it is usually because there were too many misunderstandings.

- Assign real roles to the community organisations' representatives (e.g. tutors, mentors) and "power" to engage in planning the SL project and course as it can assist in their motivation - it is important for to share the "power" and responsibility for student learning and reflection.

- Be culturally responsive and discuss language and different customs of the community partners beforehand.

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Service - learning in Higher Education
Recommendations for HE teachers // academics (teaching staff)

- Provide joint reflection opportunities with the community partners, within the course and together with other groups.

- Keep a good documentation on the community partners' activities and involvement.

- Maintain your contact with community partners, aim for the long-term trustworthy partnerships.

- Make sure that you work with them, not for them.

- Identify the expectations your partnering organisations might have regarding their own roles in particular SL course/project.

- Try to organise an event like "university-community breakfast" with community organisations of potential interest for collaboration in SL projects - what bothers them? what are the issues they work on; they are trying to solve? How do they see the university role in solving those issues?

- It is important to let people from community organisations to come to the university (campus) so that they feel the actual intentions of university - sometimes it's more powerful if organisations are invited to the university then if everything is organised in community organisations - such university openness might be more empowering for community organisations that we at the university are aware of - it can assist in developing community organisations' sense of belonging to the university, of becoming a true partner and collaborator.

Service - learning in Higher Education

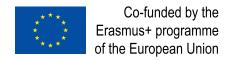## Recommendations for HE teachers // academics (teaching staff)

- Promote benefits of engaging in SL projects for community organizations. Students' volunteering (after SL projects finishes) might be an added value and something that community organizations can find interesting to further get motivated and engaged.

- Celebrate your work together and set up any kind of awarding system/procedures/practices of your community partners. Promote your joint engagement in the media, it might attract other organisations to engage as well.

- Analyse possibilities of follow-up projects with your community partners.

- Connect with your university alumni when they start to work in organisations that might fit the scope of your interest for SL collaboration - working with your former students might be a great first step to introduce SL to (new) organisations of students.

- Use partnership agreements or a memorandum of understanding for setting up the collaboration on SL courses/projects with community partners.
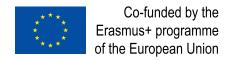
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Service - learning in Higher Education
Recommendations for students

- Be open for engagement in new and innovative teaching & learning pedagogies.

- Get acquainted with SL as a pedagogy and with examples of good practices, both nationally and internationally.

- Be ready to assume your share of responsibility.

- Set realistic goals, follow a plan, and complete your tasks on time. Your personal commitment and team communication are critical to the success of the project.

- Follow the organisational codes of conduct. You might be engaged in projects where your discretion is of great importance.

Service - learning in Higher Education
Recommendations for students

· Report any problems and difficulties in advance/on time.

· Bear in mind that SL projects can be quite time-consuming, so your organisational skills are quite important.

· Acknowledge the possibility of failure/ as a learning path. Failure is also an important life and work experience. Failure is part of the learning process.

· Work on establishing your own social networks and make real-life connections with partnering organisations, they might be your future employers.

Service - learning in Higher Education

Recommendations for community organisations // stakeholders

- Be open for engagement in new and innovative teaching & learning pedagogies.

- If you have prior experience with SL projects, share your thoughts, challenges and fears with academics before you embark on the new SL project

- Get acquainted with SL as a pedagogy and with examples of good practices, both nationally and internationally. Pay particular attention to the students' mentoring process, as usually community partners underestimate its complexities and how time-consuming it can get.

- Plan your engagement in SL projects in your projects' timelines and budgets.

- Be ready to assume your share of responsibility in each phase of the SL course/project.

- Establishing collaboration with universities might take some time, please have the patience.

- Usually it is challenging to synchronize the schedule of the academic year with organisational projects and activities, so bear in mind that when planning the SL project.

Service - learning in Higher Education

Recommendations for community organisations // stakeholders

- Courses are usually set up within one semester, meaning you might have just 10-15 weeks for the SL project. If you are interested in long-term projects and collaborations, let the academics know that and try to plan such collaborative projects together.

- Bear in mind that when you engage in SL projects and want to continue collaboration you will have to adjust to the frequency of changing students. Such adjustment might be challenging for you, your organisation and/or your beneficiaries.

- Engage in needs assessment prior to the SL course/ project and share your expertise on certain issues.

- Engage in planning the SL course/project, particularly in creating students' assignments.

- Engage critically and constructively in SL course/project evaluation - your input might be crucial for (re)designing a course.

- Choose one person in the organisation to play a coordinating role. Let the professor and students have a secure point of communication and discussions on various (challenging) issues.
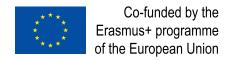
Service - learning in Higher Education

Recommendations for community organisations // stakeholders

· Set up and clearly communicate working rules that align with your organisational values, particularly if there are certain professional matters that require students' discretion or keeping professional secrets. If there are such cases, ask academics and/or students to sign contracts/memorandums of understanding.

· If students will spend time in your organisation, make sure to provide them with all that is necessary for successfully completing their assignments (e.g. space to work, computer, phones, workshop materials)

· Communicate and promote your collaboration with universities within your circle of collaborators (e.g. other organisations/institutions), as it might attract them to collaborate on SL courses/projects in the future.

· Communicate and promote your collaboration with universities with your donors, sponsors, supporters as they might find it as an added value to your current projects/activities.

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Service - learning in Higher Education

Recommendations for national and European (relevant) stakeholders

- Establish mechanisms to support awareness of the SL potential within the concept of student-centred learning pedagogy - e.g. including SL as a useful teaching strategy in various EU policy papers related to HE teaching and learning (e.g. make connections with students' engagement, social inclusion).

- Support national and European formal and informal networks that promote SL as an innovative teaching and learning pedagogy

- Establish funding mechanisms to support both national and comparative research studies on SL, particularly those longitudinal ones.

- Make SL part of the HEIs performance agreements

In addition to the recommendations, SLIHE team is happy to present a selection of **good practice examples of service-learning** courses at universities from six different partnering countries - Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Romania and Slovakia - collected with the aim of promoting service-learning pedagogy in European higher education area. Some of those examples are new initiatives, while some have been successfully running for many years. We hope these examples might inspire you to transform your teaching and start your own service-learning course and/or to connect you with the SLIHE team and colleagues with whom you might want to collaborate in the future on similar projects. We have been busy and happy to collect many examples and you can check them out, together with the recommendations, at our project website:

SERVICE-LEARNING

RECOMMENDATIONS AND EXAMPLES
OF GOOD PRACTICE

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