**Project 12 – Exploring Service Learning as an Entry into the Social Economy**

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**Learning Partnership:** A teaching and learning strategy that fosters engagement with meaningful community service and reflection to enrich the learning experience

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**Introduction**

- Build on positive evidence of service learning from the individual perspectives of social economy organizations and students
- Promote and strengthen the relationship between the social economy and Universities
- Students gain an understanding of the valuable contribution community and social justice organizations make toward attaining social and economic justice

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**Background and Rationale**

- Community and engaged learning playing a more prominent role in the University experience
- Strengthen partnerships between Universities and social economy organizations
- A multi-strategic approach to education and learning helps strengthen the social economy

**“I do not get a lot of practical knowledge from the education program, so such an experience was very valuable.”** – Student, Spring 2008

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**Project Methodology**

- Meet with partners and share course objectives
- Community partners define particular tasks
- Develop course and integrate partners’ tasks
- Introduce community learning placements into course
- Assessment complements or supplements pedagogy
- Purposeful reflection components including relating skills learned and experiences to course content
- Pre and post reflection meetings with all participants

**“My original expectation was for students who would be able to grasp the importance and value of Parkland to other U of A students like themselves, and be able to come up with original and creative ideas for engaging those students in our work.”** – Organization Supervisor, Spring 2008

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**Role and Participation of Community Partners**

- Supervised students
- Developed learning tasks
- Determined purpose of task
- Evaluated process

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**Preliminary Findings From Student Experience**

- Overall satisfactory to excellent experience - 95%
  - Expectations met – 54%
  - Concern for welfare of broader number of people - 80% agree to strongly agree
  - 75% agree there is a likelihood of involvement with community or civic affairs
  - Likelihood of being involved:
    - With organization – 70%
    - Similar organization – 52%

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**How Students Benefited**

- Challenged to connect course material to “real-life” context
- Reflection on relationship between education and teaching
- Professional communication skills
- Hired student researchers – experience data collection
- Experience social justice work within community setting

**“And really just to make you an actual social citizen, so you can contribute to society, rather than just saying “I’m a teacher and I teach, and then I go home and that’s it.”** – Student, Spring 2008

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**Implications for the Social Economy**

**Community Learning Placements Provide Exposure To:**

- Students
  - Informal exchanges
  - Voluntary and community-based organizations
  - Social enterprises
  - Community associations
  - Organizations that are independent of government

- Community Organizations
  - Access to specialized skills
  - Mentoring new groups
  - Meet social objectives
  - Create a strong, sustainable, prosperous and inclusive society

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**Next Steps**

- Strengthen linkage between learning process and the social economy
- Consider appropriate assessment strategies
- Explore learning placements across degrees and disciplines
- Make it simpler for social economy organizations to participate in curriculum and evaluation materials
- Foster dialogue across students and organizations
- Explore how Social Economy Organizations can be both sites of learning and sites of social change