

# Service Learning Annual Report for 2011

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## Background

The University of the Free State (UFS) currently follows a national and world-wide trend towards searching purposefully for ways in which to increase the relevance of academic programmes for students and society in a rapidly changing world. A considerable number of UFS staff members regard the community-based experiential pedagogy of service learning as a valuable form of community engagement which actively involves higher education staff, students and a variety of stakeholders in society. During 2011 a total number of seventy three (73) academic staff members actively participated in service learning by implementing such a module or programme for their students. The number of academic modules with a service learning component was sixty three (63). The total number of students who participated in such credit-bearing modules was 3 144 and among them an estimated number of 97 733 hours of active service were rendered in collaboration with external service learning partners from a wide range of government and community-based organisations. During 2011 the UFS allocated an amount of R1 200 000,00 for the implementation of service learning modules.

The aim of service learning is to advance the integration of community engagement with teaching and learning. Thus, section 4.2.1 of the UFS Community Service Policy (2006, cf. [http://www.ufs.ac.za/dl/userfiles/Documents/00000/107\\_eng.pdf](http://www.ufs.ac.za/dl/userfiles/Documents/00000/107_eng.pdf)) states that “the inclusion of compulsory community service learning modules **in all academic programmes (at least one per programme)** is a policy priority and will be propagated accordingly”. Specific reference is made in the policy to the ‘proven record’ of service learning as an educational approach that leads, through reflection, to “a deeper understanding of the linkage between curriculum content and community dynamics, as well as the achievement of personal growth and a sense of social responsibility within staff and students involved”.

The Policy also proposed that service learning, like all other forms of community engagement, has to be embedded in a context of continuously negotiated, respectful partnerships that involve relevant community-based organisations, as well as local and provincial triple helix stakeholders. During 2011 the UFS’s Directorate: Community Engagement largely took responsibility for broader partnership formations and community engagement in the more general sense of the concept; the Service Learning Division of the then Centre for Higher Education Studies and Development (now the Centre for Teaching and Learning) focused more on aspects specifically related to service learning as a curricular form of engagement and educational approach. The Division (with two full-time and one part-time staff members) provides various forms of support for lecturers who offer service learning modules. The Division therefore endeavours to liaise closely with the Portfolio Committees for Community Engagement and Service Learning in the various faculties and on the QwaQwa campus.

## Key Tasks of the Service Learning Division

The following are regarded as the key tasks of the Division:

- 1) facilitation of the budgeting process with regard to service learning modules;

- 2) support for sustainable implementation of existing service learning modules and strategic development of new ones;
- 3) liaison with UFS staff and external partners;
- 4) staff development with regard to service learning;
- 5) working towards the promotion and inclusion of service learning in performance management and promotion criteria;
- 6) developing mechanisms for quality management (including evaluating the impact of service learning on students and communities);
- 7) providing institutional guidelines for risk management and ethical issues regarding service learning;
- 8) utilisation of a web-based database for service learning for reporting purposes;
- 9) national and international liaison; and
- 10) promoting service learning as a scholarly activity.

In addition to the above tasks, the Division has, during 2011, also continued to focus more closely on collaboration with and capacity-building for some of the Non-profit Organisations (NPOs) that provide service learning opportunities for UFS students. Funding made available by a Charitable Trust (through facilitation of UFS Research Development) during 2010 and 2011 was utilised for the UFS-NPO Research and Development project with the able assistance of a UFS-based project manager from the Centre for Development Support. The final report of the project may be viewed at <http://supportservices.ufs.ac.za/content.aspx?id=263>.

## Service Learning as Scholarship of Engagement

Service-learning-related research outputs have been increasing over the past five or more years (one PhD awarded; several Master's studies completed and underway; a broad variety of scholarly articles were published; and many conference papers delivered). In October 2010 the NRF extended its first call for submission of applications for funding within their new Community Engagement programme. The Charitable Trust project was used as the basis for a three-year research project proposal, entitled "Knowledge as enablement – NPO focus". Twenty-three persons from the UFS, other universities and the NPO sector collaborated in developing the proposal and resolved to form part of the research team. The proposal was accepted and 2011 marked the first year of implementation. The Annual Progress Report for 2011 was submitted on 23 March 2012.

## An Overview of Service Learning in 2011

Even though not all the service learning modules that were offered during 2011 had been captured on the web-based service learning database, yet the following information may be gleaned from what has been available in February 2012:

- The number of service learning modules or modules with a service learning component offered has been steadily growing (e.g. from 34 in 2007, to 48 in 2008, to 58 in 2010, and **63 were offered in 2011**).

- The **number of students** who enrolled for and completed service learning modules during the course of 2011 is **3 144**. Recent calculations indicate that these students spent an estimated **97 733 hours of service and community-engaged learning**. If each student interacts with a minimum of five community members, the number of persons involved in these meaningful service activities is at least 15 720.
- The number of **academic staff involved** was a minimum of **74 full-time** and several more part-time or on contract basis.
- **Partnership formations and sites (over 100)** where service learning implementation takes place range from urban (Bloemfontein, Mangaung, Heidedal), peri-urban (informal settlements) to rural (sites around the QwaQwa campus and several sites within the Xhariep district). These partners/participants comprise a variety of NPOs; faith-based organisations; municipal health clinics, old-age homes; primary and secondary schools; pre-school centres; local libraries; small businesses (SMME sector); and community development sites. A list of service learning partners may be viewed at <http://supportservices.ufs.ac.za/content.aspx?id=207>

The UFS made an amount of R1 000 000,00 available for the implementation of service learning modules during 2011. An additional amount of R200 000,00 was kindly made available by the Director of Community Engagement and this allowed all the lecturers to continue offering the service learning modules that form part of their students' academic programmes.

As in the past, the funding was utilised for transportation of students; hours worked by additional staff on contract basis to accompany students; smaller amounts per student group for community project funding; training materials; refreshments; and a concluding joint celebration ceremony per module. Several of the modules also received smaller amounts of project funding from the business sector as enthusiastic students drew them into their community service endeavours.

## Service Learning in the Faculties

The bulk of the service learning work by far is done within the various faculties of the UFS. Committed, knowledgeable colleagues take it upon themselves to undertake the curriculum development, partnership-building, practical implementation, risk management, ethical collaboration and quality management that are required for effective service learning engagements. Each faculty has a well-functioning (portfolio) Committee for Community Engagement and Service Learning that manages and oversees all the aspects just mentioned. These committees liaise with and report to the UFS Management Committee for Community Engagement and Service Learning. They also report to the various faculty boards. Most of the faculty committees have to be commended for their high quality of functioning which contributes significantly to the sustained improvement of all service learning initiatives over time. It is, however, recommended that faculties ensure that their community engagement and service learning activities are well-represented on the faculty websites in order to make it more visible.

The table below gives an overview of 2011 in terms of the numbers of service learning modules; staff members involved; students who engaged; hours served in community-based settings; and funding allocated per faculty.

<b>Summary of service learning modules, staff, students, service hours and UFS funding per Faculty</b>					
<b>Faculty</b>	<b>Number of modules involved</b>	<b>Total staff members involved</b>	<b>Number of students involved</b>	<b>Total community hours</b>	<b>Total amount allocated per Faculty</b>
Economic and Management Sciences	5	3	407	3 337	R50 000,00
Education	1	2	151	151	R20 000,00
Humanities	21	25	1 065	19 264	R190 000,00
Health Sciences (Schools of Medicine, Nursing and Allied Health Professions)	19	25	1 134	72 864	R653 000,00
Law	3	2	84	708	R123 000,00
Natural and Agricultural Sciences	9	12	247	328	R114 000,00
Theology	5	5	56	1 081	R30 000,00
<b>Total</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>3 144</b>	<b>97 733</b>	<b>R1 180 000,00</b>

In order to provide a little more detail, the following may be stated regarding the service learning modules (or modules with a service learning component) that were offered during 2011:

### **The Faculty of the Humanities**

**Twenty one (21) modules** within various academic programmes, some of which are multidisciplinary. Almost all academic programmes have a service learning component, including the programme for the Humanities; Political Transformation and Management; Language Practice; Psychology; Social Work; Art Administration; Drama and Theatre Arts; Music Education; Exercise and Sport Sciences; and Sociology. (Information per module may be viewed at <http://supportservices.ufs.ac.za/content.aspx?id=208>)

*Example: In the Study Buddy service learning module in Psychology students engage with secondary school learners to enhance their studying and general coping skills.*

### **The Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences**

**Five (5) modules** within different academic programmes, including Entrepreneurship for SMMEs; Accounting for Small Businesses in the Qwaqwa region; Economics; and International Economics. (Information about individual modules may be viewed at <http://supportservices.ufs.ac.za/content.aspx?id=208>)

*Example: OBS (Entrepreneurship) students engaged with small business people who are involved in the Hand-in-Hand project of the MUCPP.*

## **The Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences**

**Nine (9) modules** within various programme, including Consumer Science (community development through sewing project); Urban and Regional Planning (various modules); Architecture (design projects at NPOs); Computer Sciences and Informatics (computer training for community members at South campus); training for emerging farmers (Agriculture); and the Science Education module of the Physics Department. Information about individual modules may be viewed at <http://supportservices.ufs.ac.za/content.aspx?id=208>.

*Example: the elective Science Education service learning module, offered on site at Heidedal Schools and the science centre of the Boyden Observatory, is generic and students from any programme can enrol for it)*

## **The Faculty of Theology**

**Five (5) modules** within four academic programmes, including Pastoral Therapy for Offenders; Pastoral Care for the Terminally Ill; Community Development (Missiology); Pastoral Care for the Aged; and Practical Theology students engage with the Towers of Hope leadership centre for the homeless and other vulnerable persons of the inner city. Two of these modules may be viewed at <http://supportservices.ufs.ac.za/content.aspx?id=208>

*Example: Students enrolled for the Master's Programme in Pastoral Therapy engage with inmates of the local maximum security facility.*

## **The Faculty of Law**

**Three (3) modules** in addition to the practical work that students do within the ambit of the UFS Law Clinic (i.e. Legal Practice, Law of Procedure and Law of Evidence). The modules may be viewed at <http://supportservices.ufs.ac.za/content.aspx?id=208>

## **The Faculty of Health Sciences**

This Faculty have embraced the notion of Community-Based Education long before “service learning” entered the educational arena. At this point in time all the schools have developed distinct service learning modules, where reciprocal, mutual learning within a partnership context is required. These modules and programmes are offered in addition to and in combination with the clinical practice of students. Information about the individual modules in the Faculty may be viewed at <http://supportservices.ufs.ac.za/content.aspx?id=208>

## **School of Nursing – eight (8) modules**

(Client Education; Wound Care projects; Nursing Education; Research Project in Post-Natal Care; Early Childhood Community Health; and General Nursing: Community Health projects in collaboration with schools).

### **School of Medicine – three (3) modules**

(Community Health: Concepts of Health and Disease; Health and Disease in Populations; the Doctor and the Environment)

### **School of Allied Health Sciences**

- **Occupational Therapy – four (4) modules** with interlinked service learning components and a wide variety of partners.
- **Optometry – one (1) module** offered at various community sites.
- **Dietetics and Human Nutrition – one (1) module that involves many hours of service**, various vulnerable communities served.
- **Physiotherapy - two (2) modules**, various community partners.

### **The Faculty of Education – one (1) module listed**

## **Student Outcomes of Service Learning**

The impact that the service learning experience has on students is gauged through the authentic assessment of learning outcomes; by means of the reflection reports that they write; and through the pre- and post-implementation survey questionnaires that all service learning students are required to complete. All of the results gleaned through these quantitative instruments and qualitative mechanisms point to the fact that well-structured service learning modules are bound to add an invaluable component to the training of our students – specifically regarding the personal meaning that they find when linking theory to real-world experiences, and critically considering their roles as responsible citizens in the lives of local, regional and global communities.

In many instances the creativity and care that students exhibit when they undertake their community-based work are quite breath-taking. For the majority of students these experiences have a profound influence on the meaning-making process with regard to application of theoretical content in real-world contexts. There is ample evidence that most of the critical cross-field outcomes (CCFOs) are enhanced by service learning, such as their understanding of the world as a set of related systems, and on the value of working in diverse groups. Through carefully structured reflection many students undergo a transformative learning experience through which they get to appreciate the value of life-long learning through respectful engagement and collaborative meaning-making with others, including the most vulnerable members of society. Opportunities to share an awareness of our common humanity with “clients” are often a life-changing experience for students, especially for those who initially did not want to do service learning!



## **The Impact of Service Learning Modules on Community and Service Sector Constituencies**

It will be no mean feat to measure the impact of 63 service learning modules, involving students from more than 50 disciplines from across the faculties that are implemented at a broad variety of community organisations and sites. However, each module has to be offered according to a set of quality management mechanisms that has been developed over the years and that are reinforced regularly. The outcomes are evaluated in terms of indicators agreed upon between the UFS staff members and the community partners when the terms of engagement are negotiated before the modules commence. The impact ranges from something as graphic as the size of a wound that might have shrunk from 40cm to 4cm during the wound care projects undertaken by nursing students, to increased levels of awareness about and resiliency in the face of bullying in the school environment.

Examples of the impact of service learning abound. One module that has been developed/adapted more recently is the following: Since adopting the service learning approach to their community-based education Optometry students have added an invaluable community project component to their regular eye-care-related training, such as finding sponsors to fund the building of proper small toilets at a nursery school that operates from an old bus – in addition to eye-testing for the little ones and training staff in awareness of vision-impaired children. It can be stated categorically that monitoring and evaluation of the achievement of outcomes as agreed upon by participants are key elements of ethical engagement between the UFS and external service learning partners.

## **Service Learning Capacity Building for UFS Staff and Others**

In order to equip lecturers with the knowledge, skills and disposition that they require to implement effective service learning modules, a specialised 20-credit module in Service Learning (HES717) is offered as part of the Master's Programme in Higher Education Studies of the School for Higher Education Studies. A considerable number of staff members have already completed this module. Additional staff development activities that were offered included invited speakers who are specialists in relevant fields.

The Division has also developed a UFS accredited Short Learning Programme in Service Learning Capacity Building (SPSLCB). This programme is offered at NQF level 9 and articulates with the MA(HES). During 2011 the SPSLCB was offered for the second time at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) to five lecturers and one CE administrator. Prof. Mabel Erasmus and Dr Luzelle Naudé (UFS Psychology Department) co-presented the programme over three two-day contact sessions on UJ campuses during 2011 and at the beginning of 2012.

## **International Liaison**

From time to time the Service Learning division are privileged to host international guests who add considerable value to the work that we do. Profs Carla and Jeffrey Ramsdell of

Appalachian State University (ASU) spent three months (April – June) in 2011 working on community engagement projects that involved various faculties and departments of the University of the Free State. Mrs Dikgapane Makhetha from the UFS Service Learning division was coordinating all the projects. Prof Carla Ramsdell facilitated extra physical science classes which included experiments for grade 5 & 6 learners at St. Mary's primary in Bochabela. The teachers enhanced the success of the program which added value to the curriculum based lessons. In another project that involved Master students from the Department of Computer Science and Informatics, about six computers which have been stored in a classroom for sometime were installed and brought to usage. Prof. Carla Ramsdell discussed the possibility of partnerships with leaders of Math and Science project from the Faculty of Education after being exposed to one of their community projects in Sterkspruit. The CAN-DOO climate action international pilot project was also initiated during the meetings between Prof. Carla Ramsdell, Prof Sue Walker and Mr Stephan Steyn from the Faculty of Agricultural and Natural Sciences. Prof Jeffrey Ramsdell collected data through interviews that involved experts and community members for his research on building material used for South African low budget housing. During the meeting between Prof. Jeffrey Ramsdell and the management of the NPO Lebone House discussions around involvement of ASU students in the construction of renewable energy project also took place.

During August the Service Learning Division had the honour to host another external expert from the USA who was invited by the Rector and the Vice-Rector: Academic to “undertake a critical review and evaluation of service learning and community engagement as currently practiced by the UFS”. Prof. Timothy K. Eatman, Ph.D. (Assistant Professor of Higher Education and Director for Research, Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life, Syracuse University) was invited in view of his international status as a public scholar and an expert in various fields related to civic engagement. The dates of his visit were from 10 to 23 August 2011. With the kind and able assistance of colleagues in all the UFS faculties, the Service Learning Division arranged an extensive programme for the guest during which he (in some instances also his mother and daughter who accompanied him) visited various community projects and sites. All the faculties hosted Prof. Eatman and discussed their work, hopes and dreams with him. The considerable number of staff members who shared their service learning and community engagement-related work with Prof. Eatman during his visit, are currently still awaiting a report of his findings regarding the “rich experiences” he mentioned in an e-mail message afterwards. More information about Prof. Eatman and the visit can be viewed at <http://supportservices.ufs.ac.za/content.aspx?id=246>.

Internationally there is a growing focus on collaborative community/civic engagement as a global strategy in the search for sustainable solutions through local-global linkages. This opens up exciting possibilities for the future of higher education community engagement, and service learning in particular. I am convinced that the UFS needs to make it a priority to be part of the global movement towards increased responsiveness and deeper forms of engagement.

## **A Challenge and a Cheer**

Those of us who have first-hand experience of the significant outcomes of service learning for students, community members and lecturers for various reasons find it challenging to successfully convey the message of the exceptional value of this form of engagement to management and the rest of the campus. We need to focus our attempts on being and becoming more visible and more vocal, and for this we also require the voices of our students and our community partners.

In conclusion: It is much appreciated that an increased amount of funding was made available for the implementation of service learning modules in 2012. This sends out a message that service learning is acknowledged as an invaluable component of the engaged, scholarly work of the UFS. As service learning practitioners, students and partners we shall keep on striving to live up to these expectations.