

Chapter 6

E-Service-Learning in Virtual Teamwork

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ABSTRACT

Service learning opportunities need not be limited to the traditional classroom. Electronic service learning (e-service learning), also known as online service learning, breaks free from geographic restrictions and can take place anywhere students have Internet access. With over 6.7 million students enrolled in online courses through American universities, integrating e-service learning into the online environment can enrich the education of this growing number of online students. Coupled with virtual teamwork, e-service learning provides students with unique leadership opportunities that transcend the traditional classroom. Along with benefits there are also challenges associated with both e-service and virtual teamwork. This chapter focuses on the benefits and challenges of e-service learning in virtual teamwork, sources for e-service opportunities, and instructional design strategies to equip instructors with the tools for implementing this valuable learning experience.

INTRODUCTION

The benefits of service learning have been well documented and found to be often transformational for students in the face-to-face classroom. Service learning has

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0874-8.ch006

the potential to make a significant positive impact upon students' academic learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000), as well as their personal development (Rockquemore & Schaffer 2000; Wang, 2000), and interpersonal skills (Astin & Sax, 1998), including communication and cultural awareness (Bloom, 2008; Gutheil, Chernesky, & Sherratt, 2006). Studies have shown that service learning increases students' sense of social responsibility as well (Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Johnson & Bozeman, 1998), and may be motivational for commitment to future service (Potthoff, Dinsmore, Eifler, Stirtz, Walsh, & Ziebarth, 2000; Prentice, 2007).

Service learning opportunities need not be limited to the traditional classroom. Electronic service learning (e-service learning), also known as online service learning, breaks free of geographic restrictions and can take place from anywhere students have Internet access. Generally, e-service learning entails a real world task, student reflection on the experience, and connection with course content and resources (McGorry, 2012), and can provide the same transformational experience that traditional service learning offers both students and faculty.

With over 6.7 million students enrolled in online courses within U.S. universities (Allen & Seaman, 2013), integrating e-service learning into the online environment can enrich the learning experience of this growing number of online students. Coupled with virtual teamwork, e-service learning provides students with unique leadership opportunities that transcend the traditional classroom. Eyler and Giles (1999) investigated college students' experiences in service learning over the course of one semester. Through extensive interviews with 67 students from seven different schools, researchers found that 40% of participants reported one important lesson they learned was how to work with others, while 81% found it was the *most* important lesson they learned. This collaborative component of the service learning experience is also possible in the online learning environment through virtual teamwork.

Virtual teamwork in postsecondary education has become a component of many college courses in preparing students for employment in a global environment (Karpova, Correia, & Baran, 2009). Virtual teams might well be described as "teams whose members use technology to varying degrees in working across locational, temporal, and relational boundaries to accomplish an interdependent task" (Martins, Gilson, & Maynard, 2004, p. 808). Members of virtual teams can physically meet in person at certain times or they may work completely online and never meet face-to-face. Teams that collaborate both virtually and, at times, face-to-face are referred to as hybrid teams (Bjørn & Ngwenyama, 2009). Regardless of the chosen format, as new collaborative technology continues to emerge and become more widely available, the use of virtual teams will no doubt increase (Bergiel, Bergiel, and Balsmeier, 2008). When virtual teams partner with an organization for an e-service project, learning reaches beyond the classroom and can have life-changing results. To equip

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