In the Dance and Theater class “Performance and Social Change,” Duke students learn about theater techniques while telling the stories of the women at the Durham Crisis Response Center.
The “Duke difference” – what exactly is it? What is the distinctive value of a Duke education?

The past decade at Duke might accurately be called “the rise of engaged learning.” Efforts to connect academic work with real-world issues in meaningful ways have been scaled up dramatically. Just a few examples: Bass Connections; DukeEngage; DukeImmerse; Duke Start-Up Challenge; Forum for Scholars and Publics; Pratt Grand Challenge; Kenan Institute for Ethics; Hart Leadership Program; Winter Forum. Approximately double the number of undergraduates are now involved in mentored research, and approximately one-third of undergraduates participate in dozens of designated service-learning courses.

How do students perceive and experience this growing array of learning opportunities connecting theory to practice? We suspect with a mixture of excitement and anxiety. Some do a wonderful job of making connections and self-authoring a coherent educational pathway. However, far too many face challenges tying together their learning experiences, resulting in the perception of a liberal education as a collection of courses, internships, research experiences, and community service.

How can we move students toward seeing their education as a self-authored and integrated whole instead of a resume-building assortment of activities?

The “Duke difference” occurs most fully when the four years and three summers add up to more than a collection of credits and extracurriculars. The real value of a Duke education lies in the lessons learned when undergraduates wholeheartedly engage in all forms of education – and, in doing so, discover the connections, unifying themes, and big ideas that tie together their Duke experiences in ways that are personally meaningful to them.

We look forward to working with you to make the whole of the Duke experience much greater than the sum of all its wonderful parts.

Sincerely,

David Malone
Faculty Director, Service-Learning Program
Associate Professor of the Practice, Education

We continue growing . . .

From 2009-2013, student enrollment in service-learning courses and student hours of community service both increased by 45%. More than 60 new service-learning courses were developed, with 12 additional departments deciding to offer service-learning classes.
The big debates in higher education today focus on how, whether, and why our knowledge connects us to the world. Service-learning is one way we forge those necessary connections; it creates an immediate and palpable sense of the power of learning to change the lives of the people around us, and by so doing, it transforms ourselves.

Laurie Patton, Dean
Trinity College of Arts & Sciences

We work with departments across the university:
Student Engagement

In recent years, approximately 30% of graduating seniors have taken at least one service-learning class at Duke. With more service-learning courses offered in various subjects each year, we are helping a broad range of students apply academic theory to the real world. In the past, we have asked service-learning students to take a survey at the beginning and end of each semester. From our most recent surveys, we know we are impacting students academically in addition to increasing their personal and civic understanding. Here is a small sample of end-of-semester survey findings:

- 92% agreed or strongly agreed that “The service component of the course was intellectually stimulating.”
- 87% agreed or strongly agreed that “Service-learning provided me with information and experiences that challenged my beliefs about the social issues studied in class.”
- 97% agreed or strongly agreed that “I can have a positive impact on the local community.”

Service-learning is how undergraduates get to put knowledge in the service of society. It empowers our students to learn within our rich communities.

Lee Baker, Dean of Academic Affairs
Trinity College of Arts & Sciences

In addition to supporting service-learning classes, we sponsor:
- Thought-provoking public events on campus for students, faculty, and staff
- Student research and attendance at Visible Thinking and service-learning conferences
- The student group LEAPS (Learning through Experience, Action, Partnership, and Service) which runs programs throughout the year and a Summer Fellows Program
- Social media to announce all kinds of opportunities

I’ve seen it’s possible to apply change in a way that is beneficial to all parties involved - from students who can open their minds to the issues at hand, to the community who is grateful for the time that students put into learning about community needs and their context before implementing a project that may otherwise be unnecessary or even harmful.

Leah Mische, Trinity ’14

Community-Engaged Research is highlighted at Visible Thinking, Duke’s campus-wide undergraduate research symposium.
Students often feel removed from subject matter on aging and death. Service-learning helps them to get face to face with nursing home residents and people with terminal illnesses. Students confront their fears of aging and death as well as learn that stereotypes of older adults are rarely accurate. My students take theory they learned in the classroom and apply it in the community to address real-world problems such as health care, institutionalization, policy making, and research.

Dr. Deborah Gold (Sociology), who teaches four service-learning classes related to aging and human development

Service-learning is central to Duke’s priorities of knowledge in the service of society and multi-disciplinary education, and the Service-Learning staff has done a remarkable job in leading and organizing this initiative. I am proud to be associated with great people who do great work.

Tony Brown (Sanford), who teaches public policy classes related to leadership development and social entrepreneurship

Faculty and Staff Involvement

Instructors of Duke service-learning classes say they are very likely to teach another service-learning course, according to our annual faculty survey. To continue to improve the experiences of faculty and students, we support ongoing professional development about best practices in service-learning pedagogy. Additional faculty survey results show that:

90% of faculty were satisfied or very satisfied with “the degree to which service activities supported the course learning objectives.”

100% of faculty strongly or very strongly believe that “Service-learning is worth the effort.”

Service-Learning promotes faculty and staff interaction and development through:

- Consultations with our team
- Conversations, workshops, and celebrations focused around a yearly theme
- Funding grants designed to enhance student involvement in the community
- Sharing and highlighting community-engaged class projects and faculty research
- Honoring outstanding service-learning professors through our annual Betsy Alden Award

Faculty and key staff new to Duke or to service-learning have participated in “Context and Connections,” an “engaged” bus tour and lunch with community leaders highlighting Duke’s past, present, and future involvement in Durham.

Hear from a few service-learning faculty members in their own words:
Community-Based Language Initiative

Following the successful Spanish service-learning model, languages around the university are embracing community engagement.

In 2012 Duke Service-Learning launched the “Community-Based Language Initiative.” CBLI provides support to Duke faculty in academic language programs in order to help integrate community interactions with target language groups into the language curriculum.

Arabic
Partnering locally with Church World Service, students work with recently arrived Iraqi refuges in a cultural and language exchange experience.

Through this experience, Iraqi families improve their English skills, learn more about Durham, and share their home and culture with Duke students during a weekly “dardasha,” or chat. Duke students improve their colloquial Arabic and understanding of the Arabic-speaking world.

Spanish
Courses explore the formation of Latino/a identities, the construction of community voices, and issues related to education while leading to greater mastery of the Spanish language.

Chinese
Courses work with local students in Durham Public Schools to teach and learn Mandarin. Duke students are also paired with international students working to master English.

French
Students meet with recently-arrived French speaking refugees. Students learn about issues related to resettlement while helping others acclimate to their new home.
Community Partnerships

Our partners continue to say they want Duke students to return to their agency or site. In a recent annual survey of community partners:

96% agreed or strongly agreed that “Students’ work effectively addressed a real community need.”

91% agreed or strongly agreed that “Duke students’ service helped my organization meet its mission and goals.”

We’ve been fortunate to have worked with Duke Service-Learning since almost its beginning. In the last two years, we have been particularly thrilled with the compelling courses created by the faculty and the engaged participation we saw from students in learning about farmworker issues. And the final projects that the students produced were really outstanding. We couldn't be happier with the way these partnerships have worked and are looking forward to many more!

Joanna Welborn, Assistant Director,
Student Action with Farmworkers

We work with more than 120 local partners
The Service-Learning Course Label at Duke

Duke Service-Learning’s mission is to connect civic engagement to the curriculum, and we support faculty members teaching or interested in offering a service-learning course. Our faculty consultants are ready to provide customized resources, suggest potential community partners, help develop assignments and assessment protocols, and provide feedback on course syllabi as requested.

We facilitate the official labeling of service-learning courses at Duke in STORM/ACES on behalf of the Trinity College of Arts & Sciences Course Committee and the Registrar’s Office.

For an undergraduate course to be formally labeled as a service-learning course on ACES and in University publications, the course must meet the following criteria:

- Students engage in a minimum of 20 hours of planned service activities.
- The service experience is integrally related to the academic subject matter of the course.
- Coursework involves critical reflection on the relationship between academic course content and the service experience.
- Coursework involves critical reflection on the ethical and civic dimensions of the service experience.

Contact us at any time to arrange a meeting.

Faculty and staff with the student Alden Award nominees, honored for their outstanding commitment to service-learning ideals.

Join us in this important work of developing invested, reflective, and engaged leaders.

servicelearning.duke.edu