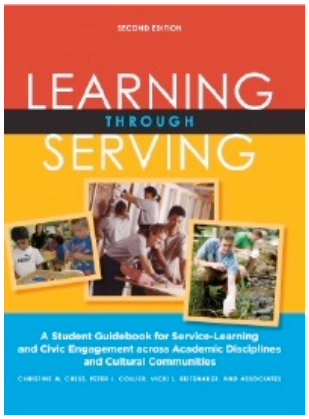


Learning Through Serving: A Student Guidebook for Service-Learning and Civic Engagement Across Academic Disciplines and Cultural Communities, 2nd Edition

Cress, Christine M.; Collier, Peter J.; and Reitenauer, Vicki L.
Stylus Publishing, Llc., 2013

Book Review

Tags: civic engagement | engaged learning | service learning

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First published in 2005, *Learning through Serving* is a collection of critical thought on the nature of service-learning, as well as a practical field guide for educators looking to expand their skills in this arena. Cress, Collier, Reitenauer, and their colleagues at Portland State University seek to respond to the organic growth of service programs in contemporary higher education – both curricular and extracurricular. Fundamentally, the authors consider service-learning as a liberatory pedagogical tool that induces students to take control of their own learning, and deconstructs the banking model of schooling (famously attacked by Paolo Freire) that remains dominant in much contemporary education. *Learning through Serving* is intentionally transdisciplinary, and will certainly be helpful for religious studies or theology educators who employ community-based learning or service-learning models. The wealth of experience the authors share, their diverse voices, and lucid consideration of socially-engaged pedagogy yield great value for those seeking to deepen their practice of service-learning.

The authors' goals are to assist educators and students in thinking through their community service experiences, in the interest of holistic conscientious formation: "In sum, the book is about how to make academic sense of civic service in preparing for students' roles as future citizen leaders" (xix). Although some readers might balk at the emphasis on "leadership" – and even the use of the term "service" itself – the authors consider a variety of leadership styles suited for different contexts, and make considerable effort to attend to questions of privilege and social justice. This is interspersed throughout the text, but the authors also dedicate a full chapter ("Creating Cultural Connections") to addressing these issues explicitly.

This guide was constructed with the intention that it would be read in the context of an academic class – thus the chapters are arranged to build on one another throughout the course of a semester. *Learning through Serving* is composed as a textbook, placing great emphasis on clarity and structure, without sacrificing substance for the sake of readability. The different chapters oscillate between hands-on course planning and more theoretical treatments of civic engagement and democratic philosophy. The new edition makes a particular effort to attend to the global interconnectedness that increasingly defines contemporary digital realities. Service-learning courses have traditionally cultivated porous boundaries between "town" and "gown," but in an academic climate that increasingly embraces remote student enrollment, service-learning benefits from critically considering how it might adjust to accommodate – and even take advantage of – new developments in university structure, while empowering students to be responsible citizens.

Cress and her colleagues are experienced enough to know that, in practice, service-learning courses rarely go as planned, and that for a variety of reasons, instructors may have to adjust their approach mid-semester. Ultimately, the service component of a class aspires to be interwoven into the fabric of the more formal coursework, integrating the two elements into a mutually-enhancing, symbiotic whole. *Learning through Serving* offers a wealth of pedagogical advice for service-learning courses, but also situates service-learning within a larger commitment to civic engagement and building a more just society. It contains invaluable nuts-and-bolts course planning assistance, and gives wise counsel on how to develop enduring, reciprocal community partnerships that build capacity for the long haul.

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