

# Serve and Learn!

## Creating a Service-Learning Course for the Translation and Interpreting Classrooms

Marko Miletich

University of Texas at Arlington, Texas, USA

miletich@uta.edu

### ABSTRACT

Service-learning has been shown to be an important pedagogical tool that benefits college level students, faculty, participating educational institutions, as well as the Non-Profit and Community Outreach Programs where service-learning projects take place. Although Social Work, Sociology and Political Science Departments carry out many of the service-learning projects, the model could be incorporated more often to translation and interpreting courses. The service-learning component incorporated to the courses SPAN 3340, Introduction to Translation, and SPAN 3341 Business and Legal Translation at the University of Texas at Arlington during the Spring 2014, provided a unique learning opportunity for the students and faculty involved. The incorporation of service-learning to translation and interpreting courses helped our students better understand the relevance of their academic coursework and increase their appreciation for social issues. The Non-Profit Program selected benefited by getting help from students who were eager to contribute to their community. Faculty benefited by finding ways to innovate their teaching and research. The educational institution benefited by fulfilling their mission of service and collaboration with a community, breaking away from the “ivory tower” image. This article describes the benefits of incorporating service-learning to translation and interpreting courses and discusses a service-learning project developed for such courses.

## KEYWORDS

community interpreting, public service translation, reflection, service-learning, translation and interpreting pedagogy

## 1. Introduction

Coming up with a single definition of service-learning is almost as hard as reaching a consensus on a definition of translation. Several issues, however, are clear and most people writing about service-learning seem to agree that it encompasses: learning, service, teaching, civic responsibility, reflection, citizenship, democracy, and critical thinking. (Bingle & Hatcher, 1996; Jacoby, 1996; Mintz & Hesser, 1996; Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, 2003; Etyker, 2001; Howard, 2003; Ash & Clayton, 2004; Harkavy, 2004; Ziegert & McGoldrick, 2004; Berman, 2006; Kaye, 2010; Britt, 2012; Cooper, 2013). Educators Robert Sigmon and William Ramsey apparently were the first to coin the term *service-learning* in 1967 (Giles and Eyler 1994: 78). Since then, many definitions have been put forward. A very complete definition is the one provided by Felicia L. Wilczenski and Susan M. Coomey in *Practical Guide to Service Learning: Strategies for Positive Development in Schools*:

Service learning is a form of experiential education where learning occurs through cycles of action and reflection as students work with others in applying their knowledge to solve a community problem, and, at the same time, reflect upon their experience to gain a deeper understanding of complex issues for themselves (Wilczenski and Coomey 2007: 4).

A distinction must be made between service-learning and

volunteerism or providing service to the community. Service-learning then, is not seen as “the traditional, paternalistic, one-way approach to service, where one person or group has resources that they share with a person or a group that they assume lack resources” (Jacoby 1996: 8). Service-learning provides a reciprocity created between the students participating in the service, the community and the faculty, a reciprocal relationship by which all parties learn from one another (Mintz & Hesser 1996: 36). Oftentimes agencies or representatives from a community do not know what service-learning really includes and how it differs from volunteerism. While volunteers may, at times, do menial tasks such as photocopying, getting coffee or taking care of errands, service-learning assignments are always related to course content and students participating in such programs should be asked to perform the services related to the course in particular (Shubow-Rubin 2001: 20). The main difference then relies in the “learning” part of service-learning. Although volunteers in any field may rely on previous (or recently acquired knowledge) to provide a particular service, participants in service-learning are using what they are currently learning in a classroom on a particular field while they are providing that service. Volunteering, as a community interpreter, for instance, which is often done in many hospitals in the United States, does not constitute service-learning either unless is part of a university course programmed as such. Although it is a laudable form of service, there usually no immediate correlation to concepts being learned in a classroom at the time the service is provided, as it is the case with service-learning courses. In addition, as it will be discussed below, a great part of service-learning is based on reflection; a way for students to think about, not only the experience of helping others (service), but also think about issues related to cognition (learning).

Universities and colleges in the United States have had a long

tradition of community service starting in the 19th century and continuing through the 20th, particularly during the 1960s and the 1980s. The twenty first century also continues to exhibit a high level of interest in service-learning. During the 1960s, there were several community programs created such as the Peace Corps, VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), diverse college work-study programs, and the White House Fellows programs. The 1970s and 1980s saw an increase in experiential learning and service-learning. In 1985, a national organization called Campus Contact was created in order to encourage community service on college campuses. Campus Contact currently includes more than 750 college and university presidents whose “membership implicitly declared their commitment to involving students in community work at their respective colleges” (Howard 2003: 1). The above-mentioned organization recommends ways to incorporate community-based learning into the curriculum. A bill passed in 1993, which led to the development of AmeriCorps, was responsible for placing more 80,000 Americans in community service. Currently, a large number of Universities and colleges in the United States participate in community service and service-learning programs (Sigmon 1996: 160-167).

Presently, in the United States, service-learning has been seen as an important part of the overall education of university education students. It is also considered very important in high schools where it is a mandatory requirement for graduation in Maryland and strongly suggested in other states such as California, Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Michigan, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas (Wilczenski & Coomey, 2007: xviii). There are over 750 colleges and universities in the United States that express a commitment to community involvement (Howard 2003: 1). In addition,

there are many countries around the world where service-learning is considered important. Among the most notable ones are, Argentina (Tapia 2010), Canada (Larson 2008), China (although in that country it is sometimes known as “social practice”) (Xu 2010), Japan (Sato et al. 2010), England (Jerome 2012), Korea (Sato et al 2010), Mexico (Tapia 2010) and Spain (Mendía-Gallardo 2012).

## 2. Theoretical Background of Service–Learning

Since service-learning is based on experiential learning, the theoretical underpinnings of service learning can be found in the writings of the proponents of this philosophy, chief among them is American philosopher and educator John Dewey (1859-1952). Although this philosopher never spoke of service-learning per se “the pedagogical goals and methods of service-learning find a clear basis in his [Dewey’s] educational theory” (Rocheleau 2004: 7-8). For Dewey, education was more than accumulation of knowledge and he strongly advocated social service as a way to gain knowledge (Hatcher 1997: 24). Dewey discusses his ideas about education at length in *Experience in Education* (1938) where he maintains that experience is not only an important part of learning, but also an essential component. Dewey emphasizes “the importance of the participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his [sic] activities in the learning process” (Dewey 1938: 67). This author also insists that educators view “teaching and learning as a continuous process of reconstruction of experience” (Dewey 1938: 87). As Julie Hatcher expresses:

Dewey’s writings implicitly support five characteristics of good

undergraduate education: (a) good undergraduate education integrates personal experience with academic learning, (b) good undergraduate education structures opportunities for reflection, (c) good undergraduate education is inquiry based, (d) good undergraduate education facilitates face-to-face communication, and (e) good undergraduate education is connected to the community (Hatcher 1997: 25).

In addition, Dewey's ideal educator stresses a social aspect in the educative process so that the educator "loses the position of external boss or dictator but takes on that of leader of group activities" (Dewey 1938: 59). For Dewey education "is a form of growth through *active experimentation* and *reflective thought*" (Deans 1999: 16).

Service-learning has also been influenced by the ideas of educator and philosopher Paulo Freire (1921-1997). Many of his ideas on education were expressed in his seminal book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2009). For this author, ideal education "consists in acts of cognition, not transfers of information" (Freire 1970/2009: 79). Freire believed education to be an agent of change in society (Freire, 1970/2009). The author uses the analogy of banking to discuss traditional education that for him "becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher the depositor" (Freire 1970/2009: 72) The concept of education as banking then, makes "the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing and storing deposits" (Freire 1970/2009: 72). This reflects a much more passive mode of learning, which in addition maintains the status quo and can serve as an instrument of oppression (Freire 1970/2009: 72).

Although the pedagogical views of Dewey and Freire contain many similarities and both can be seen as contributing to the theoretical background of service-learning, there are also marked differences.

Both are proponents of experiential learning and a just democratic society, but Freire sees traditional methods of teaching as conscious oppressive structures. In addition, Freire takes more into account issues of culture, class and race. Dewey, on the other hand pays more importance to communication and problem-solving, Freire is more concerned with radical socio-economic change. “Whereas for Dewey education prepares and motivates participation in the polis, for Freire education is politics (deepened by the belief that most formal education serves dominant political interests) (Deans 1999: 20).

A more recent influence on service-learning has been the learning theory of David Kolb. This author presents a learning cycle that includes four dimensions: Concrete Experience, learning through experience; Reflective Observation, learning through examining; Abstract Conceptualization, learning through explaining; and Active Experimentation, learning through applying (Kolb 1984: 30). This theory exemplifies the idea that service-learning serves to promote learning through direct experience with a strong dose of reflection.

Service-learning theory as Dan W. Butin reminds us “is not a coherent and cohesive pedagogical strategy” (2006: 490). And he adds:

The service-learning movement is an amalgam of, among other things, experiential education, action research, critical theory, progressive education, adult education, social justice education, constructivism, community-based research, multicultural education, and undergraduate research. It is viewed as a form of community service, as a pedagogical methodology, as a strategy for cultural competence and awareness, as a social justice orientation, and as a philosophical worldview (Butin 2006: 490)

Service-learning can be said to utilize a constructivist approach to learning. Constructivists believe “students acquire knowledge from the

social context in which they experience that knowledge” (Rogof 1984, cit. in Wilczenski & Coomey 2007: 4). In other words, “learning is an (inter)active constructive process and not a transfer of knowledge” (Kiraly 2000: 39). Don Kiraly is a strong proponent of social constructivism approaches to translator education and affirms, “learning is not an attempt to get closer to the truth, but to create tools that enable us to function efficiently with respect to the physical reality and the socio-cultural environment of which we are a part” (Kiraly 2000: 45). Service-learning can put students in contact with an everyday reality of the translation and interpreting worlds and help with issues related to terminology, emotions, deadlines, attitudes, personal interaction, problem solving, norms, expectations, and functions.

### 3. Service–Learning Goals and Objectives

The main goal of service-learning is to develop an infrastructure in order to provide a service to the community that also includes a learning experience for students. In addition, service-learning is designed to meet certain academic needs. It is a way of creating a partnership with the community and the students while providing chances for experiential learning. Service-learning “addresses the three major goals of “experiential education”: allowing students to become more effective change agents, developing students’ sense of belonging in the communities of which they are members, and developing student competence” (Carver 1997: 143). Furthermore, service-learning is regarded as “a venue for gaining a more comprehensive understanding of human diversity and challenges us to connect the critical thinking goals of the academy with our



personal value systems”(Mintz and Hesser 1996: 37). Service-learning contains what Rebecca Lyn Carter denominates the ABC’s of student experience: Agency, allowing students to become agents of change in their communities; Belonging, allowing students to feel as part of their communities; and Competence, developing students’ skills and abilities (Carver 1997: 143).

Service-learning can be divided into three different objectives: academic, personal and civic (Ash & Clayton 2004: 140). The academic objective makes the student “examine their experiences in light of specific course concepts, exploring similarities and differences between theory and practice” (Ash & Clayton 2004: 140). The personal objective has students considering “their feelings, assumptions, strengths, weaknesses, traits, skills and sense of identity” (Ash & Clayton 2004: 140-141). The civic objective makes students look at the decisions they make and “consider alternative approaches to interpretations, identify elements of power and privilege, analyze options for short-term versus long-term and sustainable change agency” (Ash & Clayton 2004: 142). Translation and interpreting students can gain a better academic understanding when conducting the task of translation and interpreting in real-life situations, they can also gain more confidence as they get more experience while translating and interpreting and finally they can recognize that their labor benefits the communities in which they live and/or study.

#### 4. Service–Learning Benefits

Service-learning has been shown to be an important pedagogical tool that benefits college level students, their instructors, participating

educational institutions, as well as the Non-Profit and Community Outreach Programs where service-learning projects take place. Service-learning helps students to better understand the relevance of their academic coursework, gain a sense of self-esteem (as they are aware of their contribution to their community), increase their appreciation of social issues, gain experience and obtain possible contacts for future employment. In addition, participation in service-learning projects provides a positive impression on Graduate School applications in the United States. Furthermore, students are helping others while providing “the added benefit of honing students’ marketable skills and encouraging students to feel good about themselves” (Speck 2001: 5). Service-learning conducted at universities provides both university level education and an appreciation of social issues (Shubow-Rubin 2001: 18).

Communities benefit by addressing social issues, knowing more about educational institutions, collaborating in the creation of projects, and participating in the learning process of students (Kaye 2010: 50). Non-Profit and Community Outreach Programs benefit from these projects by getting help from students who are motivated, energetic and eager to contribute to their community. In addition, community programs increase their resources to deal with particular issues affecting a particular locality. Also to consider is the beneficial “reciprocity both for the community and the student” (Carracelas-Juncal 2013: 297).

Faculty benefit from service-learning by finding ways to innovate their teaching and by developing new avenues for research. Although service-learning courses may require more preparation than other courses, the benefits for faculty include a better rapport with students, a feeling of satisfaction when seeing students’ accomplishments, and the chance to provide students with a real-life experience (Phelps

2012: 13).

Educational institutions benefit by combining academic development with civic and social issues, providing students with practice and importance of what they are learning, developing a better school environment and culture, and improving public relations with their communities (Kaye 2010: 49). Institutions also benefit from these programs by fulfilling the institution's mission of service and offering collaboration with a community, breaking away from the "ivory tower" image. As Jami L. Warren points out "[n]ot only does service-learning have positive benefits such as increased multicultural awareness and enhanced social responsibility, but it also increases student learning outcomes, the gold standard when measuring pedagogical practices" (Warren 2002: 59). In the case of translation and interpreting, students get hands-on experience that greatly enhances the learning process.

## 5. Service–Learning Categories

There are several ways in which service learning can be categorized. Cathryn Berger Kaye in her comprehensive book *The Complete Guide to Service Learning: Proven, Practical Ways to Engage Students in Civic Responsibility, Academic Curriculum, & Social Action* describes three categories: Direct Service, Indirect Service, Advocacy and Research (2010: 11). Direct Service consists of face-to face interactions (such as tutoring young children, working with refugees). Interpreting for the community would fall under this category. In Indirect Service, students do not see the recipients (examples of this type of service could be stocking a food pantry, collecting clothing, or creating a newsletter). Public translation and telephonic interpreting

for the community would fall under this category. Advocacy involves students creating awareness or promoting a specific action on behalf of the community (such as writing letters, sponsoring a town meeting, or public speaking). Research involves students collecting information, or informing the community about particular issues (such as development of surveys, formal studies, test water or soil, check the speed of cars passing by a school) (Berger Kaye 2010: 11). The categories that are most interesting for the Translation and Interpreting fields are the direct and indirect service ones, since those are most directly related to translation and interpreting pedagogy. There are, of course, possibilities for advocacy (such as making sure people with Limited English Proficiency [LEP] know their rights), and research (looking into mistranslation and misinterpretations in legal cases, for example).

Service-learning projects can also be optional or mandatory. A course could be labeled as a service-learning course where the service is obligatory. There could also be a service-learning component to a particular course, which is discretionary. In the optional choice, students participate in a project and in exchange are exempt from a number of homework quizzes or examinations, but not the final examination.

## 6. Service–Learning Planning

According to Amelia Jenkins and Patricia Sheeney, planning for a good service-learning program requires four stages: Preparation, Implementation, Assessment/Reflection and Demonstration with Celebration (2011: 52-59). The following is based on Jenkins and Sheeney's recommendations as they appear in "A Checklist for

Implementing Service-Learning in Higher Education” (2011). For translation and interpreting courses dealing with public service translation, that is translations of mostly informative texts produced by authorities or institutions for people that do not understand the language in which those texts are first produced (Niska 2002: 134), service-learning is a good fit. It is also beneficial for courses of community interpreting (interpreting in the legal, medical and schools settings usually in a bilateral mode). The preparation stage would mean finding a need in the community and identifying the goals and objectives for the service learning course or component. Particular attention should be paid to the type of project selected, making sure that it does not unfairly compete with assignments for professional translators or interpreters. One way to assure this is to work with non-for profit agencies. Also, details of the service-learning project should be carefully identified such as location, and number of hours required. Grading criteria and the assessment of the students participating in the project are also key issues. The implementation stage should include an explanation of the service-learning model and the performance of the service with as much feedback and support as students may need. The assessment/reflection stage is crucial for service-learning to be truly beneficial: “Reflection is the hyphen in service-learning; it is the process that helps students connect what they observe and experience in the community with their academic studies” (Etyler 2001: 35). For translation and interpreting students it is a good idea to create a survey or questionnaire for participants to answer after completion of the service (a survey beforehand is also suggested) (Jenkins and Sheehy 2011: 57). It is also advisable to require that students keep a journal or daily log, in order for students record their daily impressions and what they feel they have learned (both related to translation and interpreting or any other skill

applicable to the experience such as critical thinking). Finally, demonstration and celebration allows students to showcase their participation in the service-learning project and discuss issues related to translating and interpreting conducted in a real environment (as opposed to translation and interpreting done in a classroom environment). This can be easily done through a Power Point presentations in class, by presentations and community gatherings, creating a web site or adding information to it, creating murals or exhibiting photographs (Berger-Kaye 2010: 15-18). In addition, a small celebration (hopefully with members of the non-profit where the service-learning project was conducted) creates an atmosphere of enthusiasm and encourages students to keep participating in the community as well as engaging other students in participating in such projects.

It is important to note that adding a service-component to a class or creating a service-learning course requires quite a deal of planning and it can be very time consuming. Besides relying on teaching skills and techniques previously utilized, instructors need to acquire new information and methods and be aware of possible setbacks, particularly the first times, due to the interaction of several parties involved in the project.

## 7. Service–Learning and Translation and Interpreting Courses

Most translation and interpreting courses are usually taught in very practical hands-on approach (there are, however, courses that deal with the theoretical/historical aspects of the disciplines where no

actual translations on interpretations are conducted). Ideally a certain degree of theory (as far as different approaches to translation such as linguistic, functional, or systems theories) is to be incorporated into the pedagogy, but usually translation and interpretation courses, for the most part, rely heavily on practice, often using the workshop model for translation courses (where translations are assigned and then discussed) and role plays for interpreting courses (where role-plays, both scripted and unscripted, are interpreted and the interpretation is subsequently criticized).

Service-learning provides the already mentioned authenticity and active learning experience. It is authentic because it provides students of translation and interpreting with real life situation, involves them with clients, deadlines, and translation interpreting problems. It offers active learning because students are engaged in multiple forms of learning as they look for resources and explanations for translation and interpreting issues. In addition, it forces students to be creative and use their imagination (as they deal with lexical, syntactical, or register issues in both translation and interpreting, for example). Students are not passively repeating or reproducing what they have learned, but actively searching for solutions in real life situations by relying on previous knowledge and continuing to apply what they acquire with their experiential learning.

Contrary to other courses in other subjects where students may participate in service-learning projects right away, it would be advisable that students have some previous training as translators and interpreters before participating in service-learning courses in these fields. Students will have a richer experience if they have at least one university semester (preferably two) in translation and/or interpreting before joining a service-learning program.

## 7.1 Service-Learning and Translation and Interpreting in the United States

There have been several recent service-learning programs that utilize translation and interpreting. One of the most recent ones was conducted in Greensburg, Pennsylvania where students served as on-line translators for Kiva, a non-profit organization providing loans to people in developing nations (Frazer-McMahon 2013). The students worked as collaborators on the online translation process, under the supervision of the instructor, translating the descriptions posted by the entrepreneurs (Frazer-McMahon 2013: 255). Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne included a service-learning Spanish Translation course in the fall of 2010 and spring of 2012 (Bugel 2013), where students translated school material into Spanish and interpreted for parent-teacher conferences at an elementary school. Another interesting project was conducted at The University of North Florida in 2007 and 2008 where students interpreted for the deaf and hard of hearing community (Shaw & Robertson 2009). Students not only served as interpreters, but connected senior deaf adults with young deaf children (Shaw & Robertson: 280).

In addition, there has been a great deal of interest regarding service-learning in particular through the efforts of American Association of Higher education (AAHE) and their series of monographs on service-learning and other academic areas. The volume *Construyendo Puentes (Building Bridges): Concepts and Models for Service-Learning in Spanish* (Hellebrandt & Varona 1999) is a clear example. The volume includes an article about Spanish translation and service-learning where students at San José State University (California) translated evaluative feedback from parents with limited English proficiency. (Lizardi-Rivera 1999: 108-109).



## 7.2 Incorporating Service–Learning at the University

One of the best ways to implement service learning is through the help of a Service-Learning Center at a university or school. At our university, the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA), we are lucky enough to have such a center that assists professors wanting to create a service-learning course or include a service-learning component to their classes. Our Center for Community Service Learning offers several resources for faculty: advises and provides class orientations on service learning, helps faculty on how to implement service-learning, provides materials and resources, connects with other service-learning faculty, and participates in various center programs (UTA, 2014). Since there is so much to take into account when first starting a service-learning course or a course with a service-learning component, these centers can provide invaluable assistance.

There are many academic institutions that do not have a service-learning center or cannot count with the support of their institutions regarding this endeavor. The best way to get started with service-learning is to develop small projects, (starting perhaps as adding a service-learning component to a particular course). Regarding translation and interpreting opportunities for service-learning, many places in the United States have organizations such as: American Heart Association, Red Cross, Goodwill Industries, The Salvation Army, United Way, Center for Domestic Violence and different types of shelters. Students are often a great source of information regarding places in a community that may require some service that can be provided by students. In addition, many states have non-profit organizations that are usually open to collaborations with institutions. As detailed in section 3.2, Service-Learning

Planning, service-learning courses or courses with service learning components often require a great deal of preparation as far as interviewing possible collaborating agencies and non-profits. A good source for information regarding implementation is Jenkins and Sheehey, 2011. These authors stress the importance of establishing the goals and objectives for the service-learning course or component, determining what are the actual skills needed by the students participating, and establishing the particular resources that may be necessary for the project (Jenkins and Sheehey, 2011: 52). In addition, clear students' expectations (time requirements), responsibilities (obligations and duties to be performed) and assessment (service-learning courses or courses with a service-learning component require a grade like any other course) should be made clear from the very beginning.

### 7.3 Translation and Interpreting Service-Learning at University of Texas at Arlington

In our institution, a professor of Translation Studies and myself started to discuss the possibility of adding a service-learning component to our translation and interpreting courses that use English and Spanish languages. Once we had decided to go ahead and add a service-learning component to our translation and interpreting courses, we met with the director and members of the staff of a non-for profit agency to discuss the project. The agency we chose was Proyecto Inmigrante ICS (Immigration Counseling Services), Inc. It is a non-profit agency whose purpose is to assist the immigration population community in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area and its surrounding counties. They serve mostly a Spanish speaking population and they offer their services on a sliding fee scale. During

the past few years they have provided immigration counseling services to thousands of families throughout the Dallas-Fort Worth area. They provide free information sessions and help in the areas of citizenship eligibility, rights and the so-called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, also known as the Dream Act (DREAM being an acronym for Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act). The Dream Act is a very important part of their services and it addresses the situation of young people who grew up in the United States and have graduated from US high schools, but whose future is constrained by current immigration laws (Proyecto Inmigrante 2014).

We believed it was necessary to create a contract, which was signed by all parties. In the contract, participating students agreed to serve a minimum of 25 hours over the course of the semester offering translation and interpreting services as required. There were other points in the contract such as establishing a schedule with the organization, maintaining confidentiality and discussing concerns with supervisor and/or course instructor (see Appendix 1). The agency agreed to work with the course instructor in order to identify appropriate service activities related to translating and interpreting. The instructor agreed to consult with organization in identifying appropriate service activities for students, provide students with an orientation to service learning as well as providing on-going follow-up and support to both students and staff regarding issues that may arise in the course of daily business.

Since it was our first time creating a service-learning course, we decided to choose a service project program that was done on a voluntary basis. This follows the optional format for service-learning courses (course with a service-learning component), previously discussed, where students volunteer to participate in a service-learning and a portion of the normal coursework is

substituted by the service provided by the student at the agency or non-profit. In my course the students participating in service-learning were exempt from one examination. The project was started two months after the beginning of the semester to allow students to become familiar with the concepts and responsibilities of service-learning.

Students of translation and interpreting at our institution participated from two different courses: a Business and Legal Translation course (English-Spanish/Spanish-English) concentrating mostly on public service translation, taught by a Translation Studies instructor and students from my Introduction to Translation who had previously had taken a course on Community Interpreting taught by me the previous semester. There were 18 students that participated from the Legal and Business Translation course and 2 from my Introduction to Translation class. Although a brief introduction to interpreting was provided in my Introduction to Translation class, only the two students that had previously taken a course on interpreting were allowed to participate in the project. The students from the Legal and Business Translation course provided translation services and the ones from my course did mostly interpreting, although they were occasionally asked to do translations and sight translations as well.

Proyecto Inmigrante provided sample documents so the students could become familiar with the type of documents to translate and several of those samples were used during class instruction for the students from the Legal and Business Translation course. The type of documents translated were birth certificates, marriage licenses, divorce decrees, death certificates, good conduct letters and miscellaneous letters.

One of the students participating from my class, Introduction to

Translation Studies, was a senior and the other one a junior. They both had a high level of bilingualism and did very well in the previous interpreting class. Students used as interpreters were told about the usual interview topics with clients (mostly accounts of client's individual cases, arrival to the United States, status, and conditions of country of origin). Students that provided interpreting services used the bilateral interpreting mode, and conducted on-site (proximal) interpreting as well as telephonic (remote) interpreting. For the most part, these students interpreted interviews with clients regarding family petitions (to help reunite families based on current Immigration Law) and the DREAM Act. Students from my class spent approximately 90% of their time interpreting and 10% doing sight translations.

To cover the reflection aspect of service-learning, the students that participated from my class were required to answer a questionnaire and conduct a PowerPoint presentation in front of the class. A daily reflection was not really used, although students discussed their impressions with the professor often. Very detailed instructions were given for the presentation, which helped extract the information and reflection desired. The presentation could only have 8-10 slides and each slide could not contain more than five lines of text (to avoid the usual presentation where students read from a very long list of items, or a very long paragraph, and do not really present). The total time of the presentation was 15-20 minutes and approximately 5 minutes for questions from students or the professor. The questionnaire consisted of five questions that dealt with the students' impressions regarding the experience, the organization, the community, problems in the community and to what extent the experience complimented what was taught in the classroom (see Appendix 2). The questionnaires were found to be very effective in

providing information on the experience for the students. One of the students that participated in the project stated: "I learned that I am capable of fulfilling commitments and having larger responsibilities than I'm used to - responsibilities that affect not only myself, but others, too." The other one expressed: "From this experience I learned that I am good at what I do (translating and interpreting) and that with more schooling I will excel at it. I learned that I like working with people and that I get a sense of accomplishment from helping others."

Both students expressed that they had learned in the classroom complimented the experience. One of the students stated: "It was a great compliment to what was learned in the classroom because it gave you real life examples," while the other one added "It compliments, definitely." In addition, as expected, the service-learning provide an opportunity for experiential learning that provided knowledge learned in the classroom, but reinforced beyond the classroom.

Feedback was also sought from the staff member of Proyecto Inmigrante that served as supervisor for the students throughout the semester. They supervisor was asked to fill a short questionnaire about the project; since it was the first time they had this particular experience (Appendix 3). The staff member expressed the following:

The students were responsible and dedicated. There were times where the students would stay after the hour they had indicated to leave to finish a translation. Some students continued in participating after completing their 25 hours required.

One of the ideas the supervisor suggested to improve the experience was related to the scheduling of students, which, at times,

was not made very clear. It was obvious that the agency was very pleased with the service-learning project, which helped them grow and allowed them to provide service to more clients.

## 8. Conclusion

As discussed before Service-learning benefits students, instructors, educational institutions and community programs. As far as translation and interpreting programs are concerned, service-learning components to courses in translation and interpreting appear to be highly beneficial. Since most service-learning projects use more than one student at time at the same location, translation students can work together and help each other by editing each other's work, and creating glossaries. Interpreters, also have the chance to discuss techniques and/or vocabulary and help each other creating glossaries and discussing difficult situations (at times very emotionally charged).

In our experience with service-learning we noticed that students:

- Showed an increased motivation to learn. Students wanted to know more about translation and interpreting, read more about these fields, asked more questions, acquired more vocabulary, and started looking into ethical issues surrounding translation and interpreting.
- Developed responsibility. Students felt more professional about the tasks they were performing and realized that punctuality was a very important part of professionalism; students realized that could not be late because people depended on them.
- Learned to interact with professional adults. Students interacted with people other than their peers and adult

professors. They were exposed to a more diverse human interaction.

- Developed ability to work well with others. Students understood that they were part of a team and they had to function as such to provide the services required.
- Translated/interpreted more carefully. Students realized that a bad translation/interpretation for homework could be improved at a later date with a better one, but translation/interpreting errors could cause serious consequences in real-life situations.
- Created better glossaries. Students were able to develop glossaries from the documents/interpreting vocabulary that were similar in nature.
- Learned terminology at a faster pace. Students used similar terminology, which made it easier to remember it. They were also exposed to a larger vocabulary from a variety of legal documents/interpreting situations, which expanded their vocabulary.
- Improved their interpreting skills. Students interpreted for longer periods of times, under different conditions and were exposed to different varieties of the language more frequently, which resulted in a more assertive way of interpreting.
- Developed a commitment to public service. Students started to be interested in ways to help their communities.

Overall it was a wonderful experience and we learned a great deal from it. It gave us tremendous satisfaction to be able to help the community and see the progress and enthusiasm of our students. A few of things are worth mentioning in order to improve similar programs in the future:



- Planning a service-learning course or a course with a service-learning component takes a great deal of time. Even after the initial time spent on researching an appropriate agency, there are many meetings to be held to finalize the project. We spent several meetings making sure all the details were clear.
- The reflection aspect (an extremely important part of service-learning) may be hard to extract from students. Most of the time students are asked to express *what* they have learned, but not *how* they have learned and *in which way* what they have learned is going to help them in the future. The retrospective report (the tool utilized for reflection in our case) is also an essential tool and its importance should be explained to students beforehand, so that they answer questions posed thoroughly.
- Presentation about the service-learning experience in front of the class (strongly suggested) may need to be guided and should also be clearly structured to obtain the most information and to avoid generalizations and very short answers.
- Although Non-Profit and Community Outreach programs can greatly benefit from service-learning projects, most of them are unaware that such projects exist and faculty must make initial contact in many occasions. This was somewhat our experience although we were initially contacted by the agency with which we worked.
- As already mentioned, service-learning is not volunteering. Students are not to menial task or task not related to the course content. This needs to made very clear to the agencies who at times lack the personnel to carry out many tasks not

related to course content.

- Professors and institutions are seen in a much more favorable light since they increase the participation the community. In our case, students have mentioned the positive experience of the service-learning project and suggested the course to other students.

The benefits of service-learning for translation and interpreting can easily be appreciated. Translation and interpretation pedagogy can truly benefit with the incorporation of a service-learning course or a service-learning component to courses in these fields. In our case we would like to improve on the reflection and assessment aspects of service-learning. We expect that much more will be written regarding service-learning in the translation and interpreting fields. We hope to be able to continue to provide this opportunity for experiential learning for our students and continue to conduct much needed research on service-learning projects for the fields of translation and interpreting.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

	Service Learning Agreement  Spanish 3340: Introduction to Translation  Spring 2014	
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Name of Non-profit Organization: **Proyecto Inmigrante**

Name of Site Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Course Instructor: **Dr. Marko Miletich** Telephone: **817-272-3161**  
Email: **miletich@uta.edu**

The purpose of the service-learning component of this course is to enhance course work through student participation in Proyecto Inmigrante. This contract is intended to clarify the expectations and responsibilities of each party.

The student agrees to:

1. Serve a minimum of 25 hours over the course of the current semester offering translating and interpreting services as required.
2. Establish a mutually agreed-upon schedule with the organization for these 25 hours.
3. Notify the organization when circumstances prevent keeping to the schedule.
4. Maintain strict confidentiality regarding all client information.
5. Discuss any concerns about this placement with the site supervisor, and, when necessary, the course instructor.

The agency agrees to:

1. Work with the course instructor in identifying appropriate service activities related to translating and interpreting.
2. Provide assigned students with a minimum of 25 hours of service opportunities in the area of translation and interpreting.
3. Orient students to the overall operation of the organization and its mission.
4. Designate a staff person to serve as primary supervisor for each student, provide the course instructor with the name and telephone number of that person.
5. Record attendance of student at minimum required service times.
6. Promptly notify the course instructor of any problem with a student or relevant changes in the program or staff.

The instructor agrees to:

1. Consult with organizations in identifying appropriate service activities for students.
2. Provide students with an orientation to service learning.
3. Provide Proyecto Inmigrante with an orientation about translation and interpreting protocols according to professional standards.

4. Provide student candidates for service-learning placements.
5. Provide on-going follow-up and support to both students and staff regarding student issues.

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Course Instructor

Date

---

Organization Representative

Date

---

Student

Date

**SERVICE LEARNING REFLECTION QUESTIONNAIRE**

Please answer the following question regarding your Service Learning experience.

1. What have you learned about yourself through this experience?
2. What have you learned about the organization, the people or the community? Has your motivation for being involved in the community changed?
3. Does this experience compliment or contrast with what you are learning in the class? How?
4. From your service experience, are you able to identify any issues that influence the problem/s?
5. Do you think the service learning experience will benefit your future behaviors/attitudes/and career? Why? Why not?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience?

**Thank you for participating in the Service Learning Project**

**SERVICE LEARNING QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PROYECTO INMIGRANTE**

Please answer the following questions regarding the University of Texas at Arlington students' participation in Service Learning with your agency.

- What services did the students provide? (Please explain if translation and/or interpreting and what percentages.)
- What was your impression of the capabilities of our students?
- What impact do you think the students had in your day-to-day operations?
- Do you think the service learning experience will benefit future behaviors/attitudes/and careers for students? Why? Why not?
- Is your agency satisfied with the interaction?
- What are your ideas for overall improvement for the Service Learning program?
- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience?

**Thank you for participating in the Service Learning Project**

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