



## Incorporating Service Learning into the Apparel Curriculum Through a Mending and Alterations Shop

Rachel Eike, Beth Myers, Diana Sturges  
Georgia Southern University, USA

Keywords: Service, Learning, Apparel, Design

Service learning is a teaching and learning strategy that combines relevant community service with academic content and instruction (Bowen, 2010). Service learning benefits students by increasing their understanding of course content and enhancing problem-solving skills (Kovarik, 2010). Therefore, a service learning component was added to an apparel construction course in the fall semester of 2015.

A shop was created within the apparel program to provide mending and alteration services to members of the campus community free of charge. Students enrolled in an apparel construction class were required to work five shifts, each lasting two and a half hours, in the shop throughout the semester. When a client arrived at the shop, one of the students on shift greeted the client, conducted a fitting, and talked with him or her about the garment to create a plan of action. The student logged the garment into Microsoft Access Database Management System and placed a hangtag on the garment that contained a tracking number. Approximately two to four students worked during each shift. The students were encouraged to help each other throughout the process, from entering the data into the computer to completing the work on the garment. Finally, students would contact the client by email when the garment was ready to be picked up. Students typically completed garments within two weeks.

The learning objectives for this project were:

- 1) To develop and practice apparel construction skills
- 2) To apply problem-solving techniques to apparel construction issues
- 3) To develop and practice management skills, such as client communication, data management and mentorship skills.

Self-reflection is an essential component of service learning that enables students to pause and think deeply about how their service experience has influenced them both personally and academically (Sander, Van Oss, & McGeary, 2016). As such, students completed learning reflections at the midterm point and at the end of the semester. Students were provided with reflection prompts to help them consider how their participation in the shop has contributed to their learning experience. The following are examples of student comments from the learning reflections:

“I think the most important thing that the shop contributed to my learning was helping me build more confidence relating to my sewing skills. I expected only to be able to sew buttons and patch holes, but after I got there I managed to take on other garments that included things such as tapering and hemming (something I didn’t even know I could do).”

“The shop takes in many diverse garments; each needing different types of alterations. This experience has taught me to first place all of my alteration options on the table and then choose which procedure would best fit that certain garment.”

“On my first day I worked with three other girls and we each helped each other on different types and styles of garments. Not only did this teach me how to work well with others, but it also taught me to always be open to learning new stuff from others.”

“Throughout the shop I spent a lot of time communicating with my peers about the best solutions and assessing each other’s work in order to help ensure we turned out good work.”

“I learned how to professionally communicate the progress of a garment I was working on, enter some one’s information in the system, and draft and email to a customer. I also learned better verbal communication skills in explaining the process of my repairs to customers and working with my peers in order to find the best solution to the customers’ problems.”

The learning reflections indicated that students developed new apparel construction skills, they used their problem-solving skills to strategize how to fix the garments, and they strengthened their management capabilities. Thus, the shop was successful in meeting the stated objectives and greatly enhanced the course. This service learning project will be continued for future semesters. Suggestions for continuation include having clients make appointments due to the popularity of the shop and implementing the project into other courses throughout the apparel curriculum.

#### References

- Bowen, G. (2010) Service learning in the scholarship of teaching and learning: Effective practices. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 4(2), article 18. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/ij-sotl/vol4/iss2/18>
- Kovarik, M., & Colledge, R. (2010). The effect of service-learning on interdisciplinary learning and curriculum reinforcement, and its application to public school environments. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 4(1). Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/ij-sotl/vol4/iss1/11>
- Sanders, M.J., Van Oss, T., & McGeary, S. (2016) Analyzing reflections in service learning to promote personal growth and community self-efficacy. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 39(1), 73-88. DOI: 10.1177/1053825915608872