# Learning about Governance from Community Needs at the University of the Free State

The service learning module (GOVE3724) in the University of the Free State's B.A. Governance and Political Transformation program is a course that is 30% theoretical and 70% practical. This module combines the efforts of community partners, service providers (i.e., the government), and the school (i.e., faculty and students) that gives students opportunities to discover needs and issues in the community. It also aims to expose students to how political management strategies are applied when servicing the community to address the community's needs. Students are expected to contribute to good governance through gaining knowledge and experience at the workstation.

*Distinctive Features:*
- ☑ Focusing on encouraging citizen participation among students through community service learning
- ☑ Giving students a choice in combining various work into a portfolio for assessment
- ☑ Conducting pre- and post-implementation questionnaires that are not assessed

## Learning Outcomes (LO):

I. Intellectual / theoretical objectives: For students to attain and understand theory and knowledge from class, and to develop the ability to use the appropriate vocabulary and vernacular to speak about the topic. Students should develop the ability to think, reason, research, and evaluate information; the ability to manage the knowledge and information that they obtain; the ability to use knowledge and information to address a problem; and the ability to continually learn independently.

II. Interpersonal / life skill objectives: For students to develop the ability to interact with others. This includes student's communication and presentation skills, their propensity for reflection and self-improvement, their awareness and sensitivity to ethical issues, and their leadership skills.

III. Workplace skills and applied knowledge: For student to develop competence in the workplace, for carrying out workplace-related tasks. This includes their ability to work independently, their ability to understand diversity and the dynamic of the workplace, their ability to solve problems proactively, and the development of an appreciation for civic engagement.

## Coursework Teaching & Learning Activities:

- ✎ Service Learning Student Survey Pre-Implementation Questionnaire
- ✎ Community visits
- ✎ Test
- ✎ Reflection
- ✎ Essays
- ✎ Portfolio
- ✎ Presentation
- ✎ Service Learning Student Survey Post-Implementation Questionnaire

## Assessment Approaches

| | Name | Learning Activities | Weight | Aligned LO | Type | Generic Skills |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A1 | Test | On the theory of community service learning | 10% | I. | Summative | Study skills, Critical thinking |

| A2 | Reflection | Individual and group reflections that are completed and submitted during class | 20% | II. | Formative | Communication, Critical thinking, Problem solving |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A3 | Essays | Identification and discussion of governance practices and strategies based on community ward visits | 10% x2 | I. III. | Summative | Critical thinking, Problem solving |
| A4 | Portfolio | A collection of reports, photographs, and reflections submitted for final assessment | 35% | II. | Summative | Problem solving, Critical thinking |
| A5 | Presentation | Group presentations on the students' work and experiences during the semester | 15% | II. | Formative | Communication, Collaboration, Critical thinking |

Source: Pitso, P.L. (2016)

## Assessment Type

Both formative and summative assessments are employed in the program. This allows for assessment of students' learning progress and outcomes after service learning, particularly prompting students evaluate their experience through varying methods.

## Assessment Focal Areas

*Communication skills:* To complete group reflections (A2) and group presentations (A5), students need to communicate effectively with each other to agree on ideas and the scope of work. Students are expected to actively interact while working together and share their experiences throughout the course to develop their product for assessment.

*Problem-solving skills:* Students are expected to solve problems they encountered throughout the service learning course. With essays (A3) inviting discussion of government practices and strategies noticed in wards, students may analyze problems they found during their service and look for ways to improve current practices and strategies. The portfolio (A4) requires varying submissions, as in a collection of reports, photographs and reflections. This tests students' problem solving skills as they have to present their experience and reflections in multiple ways. The reflections (A2) also allow students to analyze their problem solving process.

*Knowledge application:* Students have to apply knowledge and theories they learnt in lessons into their service. This is assessed by the essays (A3) which requires identification and analysis of governance theories or strategies applied during the service. The comparison of theory against experience assesses knowledge application. Moreover, students can apply governance concepts and theories in analyzing their service experience, such as in the reflections (A2) and the presentation (A5).

*Reflection:* Reflection is assessed in reflections (A2). Reflection both individually and as a group allows more space for students to evaluate their performance during the service. Reflection is suggested in the portfolio (A4), which could encourage students to further reflect upon their achievements and personal growth throughout the course. Students can also look back on their service experience as they prepare for the test (A1), recalling what theories and concepts they have personally experienced.

## Assessment Standards/ Sample Rubrics

| A5 Presentation | Criteria | Reflection Questions |
|---|---|---|
| | Communication and presentation skills | **What of reflection?**<br>• What did you expect to get out of this experience?<br>• What did you observe during your first visit?<br>• What part was the most challenging?<br>• What role did I play?<br>• What of myself did I share with others?<br>**So...**<br>• What did this experience mean to me?<br>• What did I do that was effective?<br>• What values, opinions, decisions have been made?<br>**Now what?**<br>• What will be the final result of my efforts?<br>• How will my efforts contribute to social change?<br>• How can I use what I learned in my module for my future career?<br>• Will you stay involved in the community?<br>• How did I use my knowledge of Political Transformation in this module?<br>• What did I learn from transformation In the community?<br>• What did I learn from democratization in the community?<br>• What specific academic concepts relate to your experience?<br>• How does this experience enhance my knowledge of concepts of transformation and democratization? |

Source: Pitso, P.L. (2016)

## Teacher's Stories

Dr. Pulane Lerato Pitso, former PhD student of University of the Free State

Prof. Mabel A Erasmus, Head of Service Learning, University of the Free State

### Professional Engagements

Pitso worked for the government and completed her PhD study at the University of the Free State. Dr. Erasmus obtained her PhD from the University of the North, South Africa. In 2007, she was appointed Head of Service Learning at the University of the Free State, with responsibilities including facilitating various aspects of institutionalization of service learning at the university. She has supervised studies in the fields of community engagement and service learning

### Motivation

Pitso was an employee at the Department of the Premier in the Free State Provincial Government when she realized that poor public service delivery was a prevailing concern, especially in the Free State Province. She embarked on a PhD in Education at the University of Free State, focusing on service learning as a tool for preparing students for public service delivery, under the supervision of Prof. Mabel Erasmus. In Pitso's doctoral thesis, she wrote that a *"lack of consultation, ill-treatment, non-existence of complaints procedures, and a lack of punctuality on the part of officials were some of the main areas of concern indicated by the citizens"*. Pitso believes that higher education institutes have to produce well-equipped graduates. More importantly, she believes that community service learning can contribute to the holistic development of students, and raising the quality of graduates will result in improved public service delivery.

### Challenges

The requirement of cooperation between various stakeholders, such as community partners, service providers (the government) and the University for this Course may result in a heavy workload for the course coordinator. Planning for the course would also require more time.

## Students' Side of Stories

- ☑ *"Capacity to care deeply for the community. This was evident because we as students had to sit down with community members especially from the old age home. We had to listen to their problems and so forth. This has opened our eyes to the bigger picture. It has awakened passion for other people."* (unnamed student, Feb 2016)

- ☑ *"The module shed light on the importance of integrity and on the significance of having integrity and putting the people first."* (unnamed student, Feb 2016)

- ☑ *"My values were enhanced when we went to... an old age home. During that visit I had to lower myself and put myself in the position of those old citizens such as raising my voice when speaking to them."* (unnamed student, Feb 2016)

- ☑ *"The module has helped most of us get out of our comfort zones. It has enabled us to work effectively with different people in our groups. Team work skills was enhanced by having group within the project to work on our presentation and field work."* (unnamed student, Feb 2016)

## Featured Video

- ⏵ Not available

---

## References

Pitso, P. L. (2016). *Community service learning as a transformative tool for infusing the university curriculum with graduate attributes for improved service delivery* (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Free State): http://scholar.ufs.ac.za:8080/xmlui/handle/11660/4764

The 4th Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on Service-Learning (2013). Keynote Speakers: Dr. Mabel Erasmus. Last retrieved on 3 Apr, 2018, at https://www.ln.edu.hk/osl/conference2013/Mabel.html