Reflection is a critical and vital component of service-learning. Without reflection, individuals who participate in service-learning programs are less capable of working towards significant, informed, and valuable social change. Think of service-learning without reflection as driving through rush hour traffic or drawing a blueprint to a hospital—in both cases, blindfolded. In your car you move, but not necessarily in a forward direction and you end up doing a lot of damage along the way without ever realizing the extent of your actions. With the blueprint, you create a plan for a hospital, but it is not necessarily detailed enough to provide all of the services required or to allow for quality construction. The hospital becomes a labyrinth of hallways with no doors, rooms with no windows, and doctors with no medicines or tools with which to treat patients.

Reflection removes the blindfold. It allows you to effectively move forward without crashing into things and it allows you to construct a program that responds to and addresses the ever-changing needs in the community of which you are a part. It allows people the chance to take a step back from their activities and re-examine the ways in which they participate in and interact with the various components of their program—organizational structure, logistics, effectiveness in addressing need, assessing need, assessing the “big picture”.

Questions to ask yourself before, during, and after a service-learning experience:

**WHAT?**

- What do I expect to get out of this experience (purpose/goals/ideals)?
- What did I observe during my first visit?
- What is the community partner’s mission or goal?
- Are there other sites in the community that have similar goals or could be connected? What part was most challenging? What part did you find surprising?
- Describe the people you worked with at the community site.
- What roles did I play at the site?
- What about myself did I share with others?
- What did others share with me?
- What does it feel like to come into and leave my different roles (student, server, teacher)?
SO WHAT?

- What am I learning about others and myself?
- How were you different when you left the community site compared to when you entered?
- How were you different/similar than other people?
- In what ways did being different help/hinder the group?
- What did I do that was effective? Why was it effective?
- What did I do that seemed to be ineffective? How could I have done it differently?
- What are the relationship between my community service experience and my other life experiences?
- What values, opinions, decisions have been made or changed through this experience?
- What has surprised me about the community site, the people I work with, and myself?
- How has your experience contributed to your growth in any of these areas: civic responsibility, political consciousness, professional development, spiritual fulfillment, social understanding, intellectual pursuit, or global citizenship?
- What have you learned about a particular community or societal issue?
- Describe and discuss a social problem that you have come into contact with during your experience. What do you think are the root causes of this problem? Explain how your involvement may or may not contribute to its alleviation.

NOW WHAT?

- Is it important to me to stay involved in the community?
- How will my efforts working with this community partner contribute to social change? My career? What changes would I make in this experience if it were repeated?
- Will I continue to do this?
- How do we take what we have learned and convert it into action in the community we’re working in?
- How can society be more compassionate/informed/involved regarding this community?
- How can society better deal with a problem?
- What social and economic policy changes would alleviate the problem/s you are encountering or addressing?
- Where do we go from here? What’s the next step in the process?

Questions adapted from “Facilitating Reflection: A Manual for Higher Education”