SAMPLE REFLECTION ACTIVITIES

JOURNALING:

Directed Writings - Faculty can use directed writings throughout a course to prompt students to reflect on their service experiences within the framework of course content. The instructor identifies a section from the textbook or class readings (i.e., quotes, statistics, concepts) and structures a question for students to answer. Faculty can provide a list of directed writings at the beginning of the course, or distribute it to students as the course progresses. Faculty can also ask students to create their own lists of directed readings/questions based on the course textbooks or materials. Directed writings allow students to analyze course content critically and apply it to current problems and issues.

The Critical Incident - Choose an incident that involved the entire team and give them a couple of minutes to think about the incident. Then ask them to write a detailed, factual report of what happened, making sure to answer the four “W” questions, “who, what, where, when.” You can then have participants share their stories to see how they differ from another.

Double-Entry Journal - When using a double-entry journal, students write one-page entries each week: Students describe their personal thoughts and reactions to the service experience on the left page of the journal, and write about key issues from class discussions or readings on the right page of the journal. Students then draw arrows indicating relationships between their personal experiences and course content. This type of journal is a compilation of personal data and a summary of course content to help them make the connections.

GROUP EXERCISES:

Structured Class Discussions - This is a technique where the professor creates questions to guide group discussion in the classroom. Use structured reflection sessions during regular class time and throughout the course, if all students are involved in service, or modify class discussions if some students are not in service. Students can learn about the diversity of services and populations, see connections between different populations and agencies, collectively share successes and problem-solve challenges at their sites, and learn about societal patterns.

Dialogue - A good one for developing observation and communication skills. Ask participants in the morning to pay special attention to conversations they hear throughout the day, including light conversations between staff and volunteers, volunteers and sponsors or stakeholders, etc. Ask them to pay special attention to mannerisms, accents, and the tone of the conversation. Later, have the participants pick a dialogue and duplicate as closely as possible how it went. This should be done in a light-hearted manner on a light-hearted day to avoid a “bashing” session. This is an exercise that gets better with time, as their observation and retention skills improve.
**Community Mural** - Creating a mural is a more nontraditional approach to student reflection. This technique enables students to express feelings and learning from the service experience and also allows for a creative collective statement about aspects of an issue facing a community. Murals are excellent final projects for the end of a course, and can be developed in concept and final product over the entire length of the course. Students can use various sources (magazines, newspapers, other art materials) to build their mural. Faculty can use class time or out-of-class time for this work. Faculty need to define well the criteria for evaluation of content, yet allow freedom for means of expression. Display final projects at a community site or on campus. In addition, students may want to create a community mural that can be permanently displayed at an agency or community site.

**Taking Sides** - Individuals stand in clusters according to the statement with which they concur. The clusters are asked to explain why they chose the answer they did, but no individual is coerced to talk. Remember that there are no right answers. Some fun warm-up questions might include questions about whether campus athletics should be funded with student fees or they might involve some current event. Once people are comfortable with this format, you can steer toward questions regarding your project. You can modify this activity for limited space and mobility by having students stand in a line to represent a spectrum of opinion. This activity is useful when students are tired or apathetic during discussion by creating a way for everyone to express some kind of opinion and, therefore, to be involved.

**What Is This** - Provide an object or a picture of an object, such as a tree, for students to look at. Ask the class what it is, what it is used for, why it is important. (For example, a pen could also be a sword, a wand, or a time-travel device) Then ask whether an architect would agree, or a lumberjack, or a teacher, or a child. Ask whether different opinions about the object affect the way people behave in regard to the object. This line of questioning can lead to a discussion of stereotypes and perspectives among different groups in society and why it is important to learn to work with different perspectives. Try to choose an object or objects that can be tied to the projects your students are working on. This activity is useful when students are having a hard time accepting different perspectives from others in the class or from the community members with whom they are working.

**Truth Is Stranger than Fiction** - Best used toward the middle and end of a course, this exercise has students divided into groups of no more than three. Faculty ask students to write the most unusual story that happened to them during their service learning experience and to be prepared to share it with their small group at the next class session. At the next class session, have students share their stories in small groups and then come together as a class. Ask representative group members to share some of the stories and what it meant to group members. Open up the discussion to the rest of the class. Faculty should be prepared to prompt students if needed. Students learn valuable writing skills, group communications skills, and have the chance to explore what situations/knowledge affects them. With student permission, faculty can collect stories and ‘publish’ copies for all class members and/or share stories with campus service learning programs to use for community publications and other future needs.
**Values Continuum** - Faculty can use this exercise to assist students in clarifying their values and exploring the knowledge base for student opinions. This exercise can be used anytime during the course. Name each corner of the classroom as follows: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree. Name the middle of the room as Neutral. Instruct students to go to the place in the room for which they most identify after you read certain statements. Faculty can create questions based on classroom content and/or the service experience. For example, faculty may say, “I believe that individual rights are more important than the rights of the larger community,” or “I believe that service to a community is the responsibility of all citizens,” or “I believe our government has the responsibility to solve world problems.” Once students have gone to their respective places, allow time for students to discuss with other group members their reasons for standing where they are. Have each group report back their reasons for why they believe what they do, and then allow others to “switch” to a different group if they have changed their minds. Continue discussion, and then repeat the process for as long as time allows.