

SOURCE Champion of the Month
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What do you do as your community engagement activity?

I teach two service-learning courses: [Baltimore Food Systems](#) and [Food System Sustainability Practicum](#) [the latter co-taught with Meg Burke]. Over the past two years I have overseen the following service-learning team activities:

- Assisting at Moveable Feast (Moveable Feast)
- Designing a survey and assisting with farm tasks (Cylburn Aquaponics Project)
- Farm Club volunteers (Real Food Farm)
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- Farming and developing sustainable recipe cards (Real Food Farm)
- Focus groups at public markets (Baltimore City Food Policy Initiative)
- Gathering data about urban food system resilience (Baltimore City Office of Sustainability)
- Gathering information about openness to adding edible landscaping in institutional settings (Baltimore Orchard Project)
- Gathering information about transitioning to sustainable poultry production and more diverse farming on the Delmarva Peninsula (Food and Water Watch)
- Gathering information at public markets (Baltimore City Food Policy Initiative)
- Interviews with urban gardeners (Community Greening Resource Network)
- School lunchtime discussion groups (Reservoir Hill Improvement Council/John Eager Howard Elementary)

- SNAP eligibility assessment (MD Hunger Solutions) -2 teams
- Supermarket healthy food assessment (Baltimore City Food Policy Initiative and CLF)

How much time do you spend on service per week/month?

It is difficult to answer this because there is a fine line between service-learning activities and other teaching and work activities.

How did you begin to add service-learning into your classroom?

When I was a student I sought out opportunities to perform class projects on behalf of community groups. I remember that feeling of wanting my efforts to produce value in addition to educating me, and I wanted to bring that opportunity to my own students as an instructor. Fortunately, service learning was a natural complement to the other experiential and reflective activities in the Baltimore Food System class. When SOURCE initiated its Faculty Fellows program, I took advantage of the opportunity for mentoring and training, and developed a service-learning component.

What do you enjoy about or gain through teaching service-learning classes?

There are so many benefits!

- Most importantly, the students indicate that it has contributed to their learning in ways that could not be replicated in a classroom or with a textbook, and my community partners have expressed much gratitude for the assistance. Feeling that I'm adding value in these ways is the most important benefit.
- I feel privileged to have the opportunity to teach the students who sign up for these classes. They are a most special group.
- I am in the process of developing follow-on research projects associated with two of the projects that were developed for the service-learning context.
- Finding the above list of projects for the class to use has meant getting out there and using my resources to screen scores of possible opportunities. This screening process helps keep me in touch with on the ground activities related to food going on around Baltimore city.
- I appreciate the people I have connected with, both my community partners and my Hopkins colleagues through the Faculty Fellows program.

How do you find time for service in your busy class schedule?

Adding service-learning into an already-full class meant letting go of some other content that I also felt was important. It was challenging initially for me to trust in the process and know that the students would learn more from getting out there and participating in the community than they might from the additional pieces I was cutting. Their feedback confirms that this was the right decision. Adding service learning into my courses also means that I spend considerable extra time in planning and oversight before and during the quarter. By committing in advance to service-learning as part of the class design, I essentially had no choice but to continue finding time for it. That's a good thing, because when I get busy, sometimes the things I value most are the ones that get skipped!

Besides finding the time, what barriers related to your service have you had to overcome?

In an eight-week quarter, there is very little space for things to go wrong, and yet, they do. Every quarter there has been at least one service-learning team that ran into challenges that made it hard to complete their project. I take extra steps next time to make sure "that" doesn't happen again – but of course, the next time it is something new. These experiences actually teach a critically important lesson about working in the

real world where things are messy and often do not go as planned, and you have to be resilient and regroup and figure out what you can do to get the most possible out of what you have. The service-learning method of reflection helps bring that message home.

How does your service shape your development as a health care professional?

The service shapes my ongoing development most importantly by keeping me attuned to the fact that all the grand research ideas and policy projects are ultimately only as effective as the way they play out for real people in communities like Baltimore. It thus helps focus my decisions about what projects to take on in other parts of my professional life.

What advice do you have for prospective students who are interested in community service?

Make the time for it! But start with time-limited opportunities, especially as you get adjusted in the initial quarter, and then when you have a clearer sense of what it will be like being a student here, you can take on more in-depth commitments.

What would you say to someone who is unsure of the impact his/her service would have on a community?

These organizations have listed opportunities with SOURCE because they want assistance, so that is a first sign that your efforts will be valued. That said, it is true that projects have varying levels of impact on communities. Explore a range of opportunities until you find one that feels compelling to you. Also be aware that your biggest impact may not occur through the officially-designated task – it might happen through random interactions with others at the site, or because while you're there you and the site preceptor jointly identified an opportunity. If you weren't there, it wouldn't have happened. Finally, I'd encourage you to join a service-learning class, because the opportunity for reflection in these classes can be critical in understanding the value of what you are doing (for the community and yourself) and in finding ways to enhance it.

What is the community service accomplishment that has affected you and/or your community the most?

I'm thrilled with the efforts of all of my students and would not single out one student team over another!

Any final comments or plugs to promote volunteerism?

I encourage students to sign up for classes with service learning components! While all service efforts are valuable, I believe you will get a great deal more out of the experience by having the add-on component of reflection in class, and the opportunity to mesh your experience with your academic learning.



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