

## A Visit With...Jean Strait

Dr. Jean Strait is a Professor in Teacher Education at Hamline University of Greater Minneapolis-St. Paul. For over twenty years, Jean has designed and implemented urban teacher programs that feature service-learning at both four-year and two-year programs. Her contributions to the field were recognized in 2012 when she received the International Service-Learning in Teacher Education Rahima Wade Award for Outstanding Research and Leadership in Service-Learning.

Jean has continued to make outstanding contributions to advance the field. Along with publishing the book, *The Future of Service-Learning*, Jean has co-edited with Kathy Nordyke, *Service-Learning: The Marriage of Experiential Learning and Civic Engagement*. Jean and Robert Rivera are completing a text for the National Dropout Prevention Center, *Parent Engagement in Urban Schools*.

As Jean discusses in our visit here, she has seen the importance of providing service-learning in ways beyond face-to-face situations. Through Each One, Teach One (EOTO), she has provided a distance service-learning project, where high school and college students in Minnesota partner with struggling middle-school students in New Orleans. More recently, Jean has developed a non-profit organization, The Foundation for the Advancement of Culture and Education (FACE), whose mission includes increasing parent involvement and teachers' expertise to support at-risk students.

**IJRSLTE:** Jean, how did you first come to know about service-learning and how did you initially get involved?

**Jean Strait (JS):** My first introduction to service-learning came in 1994, when I started as a young professor at Augsburg College. I had just finished my Ph. D.'s from the University of Minnesota and was asked to teach Elementary Reading Methods and Educational Psychology for the teacher education department there. I really disliked the traditional lecture format for courses and I was looking for ways to use experiential learning with my students. I didn't just want them to memorize theories; I wanted them to understand them and apply them. I wanted my students to understand how children learn and why they do what they do.

Early on I met Joe Erickson, who was teaching psychology and theory in the same department. It wasn't too long after that Joe introduced me to Jeffrey Anderson; they had begun work on the AAHE Series on Service-Learning in the Disciplines. Jeff and Joe were working on one of the earlier volumes, *Learning with the Community: Concepts and Models for Service-Learning in Teacher Education* (1997). Joe and Jeffrey taught me a great deal about service-learning and

how to use it in a college course. I was immediately in love with the concept. My then mentor, MaryAnn Bayless literally held my hand as I built my very first service-learning experience and course. I had no idea how connected I would become to the heart of service-learning. I owe these three a great deal. These three launched my passion for service-learning. Joe and Jeff are still at it, but MaryAnn passed away in 1999.

Augsburg was one of the first colleges to have a core group of faculty working with service-learning and center for service-learning and social justice. The more knowledgeable I became about service-learning the more social justice oriented I became. In 1999, I left Augsburg to join Minneapolis Community College, creating a two-year pathway for the Minnesota Community College system to smoothly transition to a four-year institution. In 2001, I was asked to come to Century College to replicate this program. I met Mark Langseth, the founding director of Minnesota Campus Compact, and Julie Plaut, then assistant director. I was so impressed with their commitment that I left the classroom to become the first director of faculty development for the Compact. I traveled all over Minnesota (and various parts of the country)

teaching higher education institutions how to implement service-learning. I also did a lot of linkage work between Minnesota Compact and the National Campus Compact.

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work in service-learning. Andy Furco was running the center at UC Berkley. Sue Root was working in teacher education using service-learning at Alma College. Rahima Wade was in Iowa blazing a trail for all teacher educators. Rob Shumer was at

the University of Minnesota serving as the Director of the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse. Dwight Giles was writing articles on this great pedagogy. It was right around this same time that I was introduced to Marty Dunkenfield, at the National Dropout Prevention Center. We didn't realize it at the time, but this was the infancy of the International Service-Learning in Teacher Education work that would later morph into the ICSLTE that is now housed at Duke University. Marty was an inspirational leader. We held conferences in Ireland, Belgium, and the United States. I had the honor of co-chairing the Ireland Conference with Tim Murphy in 2009. Marty introduced me to so many people doing this work and encouraged me to write about it. I don't think that Each One, Teach One (EOTO) would have been born if not for her influence. As a matter of fact, I think one of these conferences is where I first met you Kathy!

**IJRSLTE:** Yes, I think you are right on that. Jean, your work in eService-Learning (electronic service-learning) is especially timely in view of the

increases in online education, with some students pursuing entire degrees online. Online education poses a new situation for those in teacher education who advocate service-learning for students and who want to remain relevant in programs. Can you tell me where you got the idea?

**JS:** I was still working at Minnesota Campus Compact teaching an online course for Bemidji State University. Barbara Bridges had created an online teacher education program for Bemidji called Di-LITE (Distributed Learning in Teacher Education). I was teaching an elementary literacy course in that program and I wanted to continue to use service-learning in the course. I realized that I had students completing classes online that were not based where I was in the Twin Cities; they were all over the state. That meant that any community partners would have to be located in their proximity because they couldn't physically drive to my traditional partner sites. In addition, many of the students were located in rural areas, not urban, so they had fewer traditional kinds of community partners to choose from and so we needed to think outside of the box, you know, outside the lines.

My teaching partner, Tim Saurer, and I were both working with the service aspect in our courses, and that's when we wrote the first article on eService-Learning in 2004 for Educause magazine. We were a bit ahead of our time with this because very few people were 1) teaching online and 2) working with service-learning in that capacity. It took another five years for folks to start asking questions and begin to experiment with service-learning in online courses. Joe (Erickson), Tim, Carter Hendricks (then the director for service-learning for K-12 in Minnesota) and I met often and discussed ways we could move the work forward. I moved to Hamline in 2004. Tim returned to K-12 math teaching, and Carter and his family moved to Kentucky (where he is now the Mayor of Hopkinsville). Joe continues his work at Augsburg.

**IJRSLTE:** So Jean, how did you get started with the Katrina project? How did you get this off the ground? How did it function during a semester and semester to semester?

**JS:** August 29, 2005 was the day that changed everything when a category 5 hurricane hit the gulf coast of the United States. Hurricane Katrina was undoubtedly the most horrific thing I had ever seen

and never had I felt more compelled to action. At first, students and I went to New Orleans to help with immediate relief and clean-up. When we started to experience the devastation and PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) in the ninth and seventh wards, we knew we had to continue to help. The driving question was how can we help from St. Paul, Minnesota? Being in teacher education and hearing about so many schools destroyed, I began the focus there. The schools weren't just damaged; they were wiped off the map. One school, Martin Luther King Magnet School was the only building still standing. Teachers and parents were climbing over rubble to get into the school to see what could be salvaged, and my Hamline students and I were side by side with them.

From this work, Each One, Teach One (EOTO) was born. The initial design for EOTO was to create a national-disaster-related education response model that could be replicated in any city in the United States. The program consisted of a joint online service-learning tutoring and mentoring program

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between Hamline University, Avalon High School, and grade five through nine students at Martin Luther King Science and Technology Magnet Charter School. The initial training of Hamline and Avalon tutors focused on cit-

izenship skills, how to teach and involve students in a community project to reinforce their learning, and Internet mentoring and tutoring of students to assist with reading and study skills.

**IJRSLTE:** What is entailed with online tutoring? How does this work, and/or what are some guidelines?

**JS:** I can't stress training enough. Before we started anything, my college students needed intensive training. Yes, we were working with middle school students but there were other factors- we started with PTSD training that was provided by the counseling center here at Hamline. Next, we studied the history and culture of the area. I made sure students clearly understood and could relate to what the middle school kids had experienced, and were continuing to experience. As we know with Maslow's hierarchy, if the lower levels of the pyramid are not met, then we can't even begin to start to help learners with content. Essentially, both the basic needs and safety needs have to be met before a child is ever ready to learn. We were dealing with intense trauma here, and the tutors had to be trained in how to respond to that trauma. I include trauma training in my teacher education work today because I believe it is so vital for all student learning.

For tutoring, the students and tutors worked through technology on the Blackboard learning site. The Hamline tutors were not all studying education; they came from many different fields. Because of that, we decided to focus on both math and reading instruction because these two areas were identified by the MLK administration to need the most improvement. In addition, many of the students did not attend school for the ENTIRE 2005-2006 school year. The schools had been destroyed, and there was essentially no physical place to go to school.

As for guidelines for online tutoring, we used the first edition of *The Mentor's Guide: Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships* by Lois J. Zachary. This was a wonderfully tailored text to help us move through the difficulty of the trauma. We held online sessions afterschool where students could ask for any help on any kind of homework or projects they were doing for school. Not surprisingly, many of the kids needed someone to talk to about their experience. We were working with content and loss at the same time. It was during this time that students were building relational trust with their tutors/mentors. When we traveled to New Orleans again in the spring of 2006, it was similar to a homecoming, many of the tutors and kids were hugging and hi-fiving each other. There was such a strong community!

The guidelines I would suggest are simple:

1. **Start small.** It would have been easy to get overwhelmed with the level and com-

plexity of needs the middle school kids had. We couldn't possibly meet those needs- what could we do? Just like with any other community partner at the beginning of a service-learning idea, you have to ask: What do you need? Then you have to determine if you can meet any of those needs- what good is help if it doesn't address authentic needs?

2. **Pacing.** The students will let you know how fast or slow they can go- this may be the most difficult part to get across to the tutors. It's not about how fast you can move, it is about how fast you can travel with your student.

3. **Be very intentional about communication.** The community partners need several ways and time windows to communicate. This includes website space, phone conferencing, follow-up emails, any kind of web sessions-training and communications (like a WebEx).

4. **Plan for unexpected consequences.** My students and the middle school kids are wired differently. They have never lived in a world that was "unplugged". I have often found that what I think may be a great idea for use in the program is too slow for them. One of the best things we did is to give the students the ability to continually give feedback about what was working and wasn't working. Then we gave them the freedom to try something different. Most of my time was spent in tailoring the tutoring to the very specific needs of the middle school students and then teaching the Hamline tutors how to teach to those needs.

5. **Reflection is a necessity.** The trauma that the middle school kids were dealing with was some really heavy stuff. They needed time for processing and reflecting on what happened. But the Hamline students HAD to have specific place and time for their own reflection process as well. They were processing emotions, and then also the entire notion of tutoring and mentoring. They needed time to process what they are learning and apply it to future situations.

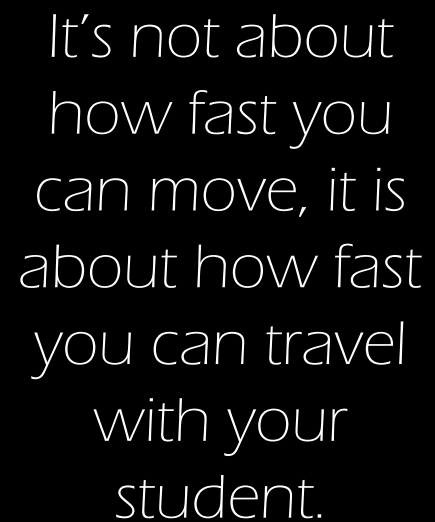
**IJRSLTE:** Can you tell me how this work influenced eService-Learning? Technology is an issue, isn't it?

**JS:** When EOTO first started, we were limited in the types of technology available to us. Initially, we were concerned about privacy and underage issues of the New Orleans middle school students. As the lead partner, Hamline University was using Blackboard as its online course application software. Working

with our institutional technology department, we created an individual specialized course shell that could be used by all participants. It was password protected to shield the middle school and high school students from any potential

outside Internet influences. All Hamline and Avalon students completed a criminal background check to ensure additional safety. Initially during the first two years of the project, participants were fortunate that the Hamline University Safety and Security office could run the checks free of charge and electronically transmit the results to MLK, which also met New Orleans state requirements. Currently, students complete background checks online through the Minnesota State System, which costs \$10 per student. This is considered a lab fee for the class, so university students can use financial aid to pay for it.

One of the first issues we encountered with technology was the limited availability the New Orleans middle school students had to the Internet. One computer lab was all the school had for all 450 students to use, and it was accessed through a sign-in basis only. The lab held 20 computers, and we were working with over 100 students. This meant that we



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needed a person on the ground in New Orleans to coordinate the times and connections for the middle school students. Consequently, Hamline and Avalon students utilized the chat room function of Blackboard where students could leave messages for one another and check them when access was available. This made the program slow in response to student needs.

One of the unintended results in EOTO included the use of cell phones. All participants quickly discovered that texting questions or concerns to their mentor worked much faster than the system we had in place. If written help for homework was needed, then that work was submitted through the Blackboard process. Facebook and Twitter also became tools of choice for the students. They enjoyed sharing pictures and family stories. The texting was wonderful for our face-to-face in New Orleans, as well as for participants' continued connections once Hamline and Avalon students returned to Minnesota. Today, EOTO participants use mobile devices and hope to equip the middle school students with iPads. In addition to learning information and media literacy, all participants gained information, communications, and technology skills, which are known as essential 21st-century learning skills. Learning and innovation skills and life and career skills were also taught through EOTO.

**IJRSLTE:** So as you were working on EOTO, then more educators started using eService-Learning?

**JS:** Yes. It was catching on all over the United States. *Service-Elearning: Educating for Citizenship* by Amber Dailey-Hebert, Emily Donnelly-Sallee, and Laurie N. Dipadova-Stocks was published in 2008. It really was the first collection of models to highlight the marriage of service-learning and technology that encouraged civic engagement while meeting the demands of an increasingly global, competitive, and diverse educational marketplace.

In 2012, Leora Waldner, Sue McGorry and M. Widener examined emerging models of eService-Learning and were able to create a diagram to describe and clarify different versions of eService-Learning. Kathy Nordyke (Missouri State) and I began doing a lot of mentoring of various programs and people around eService-Learning. We decided to edit a text that was published in 2015 by Stylus, *eService-Learning: Creating Experiential Learning and Civic Engagement Through Online and Hybrid Courses*.

The beauty of eService-Learning is that it already possesses the potential to offer all the high-impact practices that regular service-learning does. One of its strengths is making service-learning accessible to underserved populations through electronic means. Cost areas in regular service-learning become nonissues. Items such as transportation costs and meeting space requirements can virtually be eliminated. Both service and learning can be tailored specifically to optimize learning and service for all involved.

**IJRSLTE:** Most people assume online learning is mostly being used in higher education, but that is changing isn't it?

**JS:** Yes, and it will have implications for teacher educators. Two leading national associations, The International Society for Technology Integration (ISTE) and the Computer Science Teachers Association (CSTA) stress the importance of Digital Literacy and the use of technology for teaching K-12 students communication, creativity, critical thinking, problem solving and decision making. The Center for Digital Education (2015) reported that over 41% of all U.S. public schools are offering online and hybrid classes to K-12 students. Their learning environment is changing rapidly and technology is a motivating factor to keep students engaged and active.

**IJRSLTE:** So how has technology changed the learning environment and teaching practices in today's K-12 classrooms?

**JS:** No doubt the role of the teacher is changing. They aren't viewed as the primary source for information when students can instantly do internet searches to find new information and visual representations. Technology enables teachers to shift to a more student-centered approach where they can mentor and coach life-long learning habits. Technology can also be used by teachers to shift to deeper learning approaches like problem-based learning and project based learning where students can use technology to follow their curiosity about a topic. Schools and districts have increased their focus on open educational resources (OER) instead of hardcopy textbooks to save money. OER is a free resource that houses information that schools can access and use at will without any licensing issues.

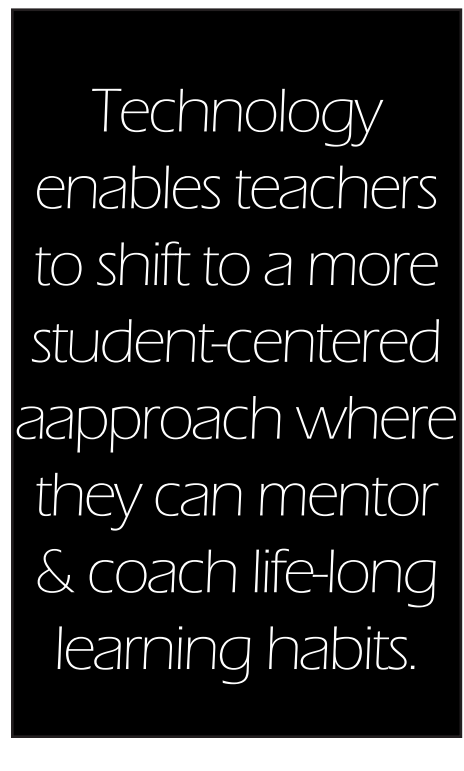
**IJRSLTE:** What overall advice do you offer for implementing eService-Learning?

**JS:** The major caution here is to start small. Trying to create an initial eService-Learning project that

is too much to manage could keep teachers, students, or community partners from ever attempting it again. Technology can dazzle users every day. The question becomes, “Just because we have it, should we use it?” Time and practice will reveal the answer for us. John Hammerlinck shared an infographic with me that he created a few years ago about online service learning. (I have attached it.) For example, if you have never taught a course online before, you may want to wait and teach it a few times before you integrate eService-Learning. You could be biting off more than you can do all at once.

**IJRSLTE:** What challenges have you seen and how can these be addressed?

**JS:** Other than some of the ones I have mentioned above, technology is a blessing and a curse. When deciding what technologies to adopt and how to implement them, educators should be guided by learning goals. In the past, digital literacy was generally defined as the ability to use digital technology, communication tools or networks to locate, create and evaluate information as the primary component.



Today, however, we also have to consider students' ability to understand and use information in multiple formats and their ability to perform tasks effectively in a digital environment. A growing number of educators believe that digital liter-

acy also includes digital citizenship, or appropriate, ethical student thoughts, behaviors, attitudes and perceptions while using technology. What many educators fail to realize is that students tend to show higher levels of digital citizenship than they do in other

skill sets such as using online research, information fluency, critical thinking, and problem solving.

One of the most valuable resources to assist educators in identifying learning goals for technology use was produced by ISTE. In 1998, ISTE created original technology and digital literacy standards, which set the baseline for assessing technology use. In 2007, the standards were revised into six comprehensive strands outlining the digital skills students need to be successful in the modern world. The six categories include: creativity and innovation, communication and collaboration, research and information fluency, critical thinking, problem solving, and decision making, digital citizenship, and technology operations and concepts. In 2016, ISTE will be launching the updated technology standards and I am anxious to see them.

**IJRSLTE:** How do you view the status of service-learning in teacher education? What have we achieved, and where do we go for future practice and research?

**JS:** For teachers, expanded use of technology has profound implications for their role and teaching practices. When students can conduct instant Internet searches for new information and visual representations, teachers are no longer the primary source of information and can shift to a more student-centered approach involving mentoring and coaching. Technology can also enable a shift to deeper explorations of content such as problem-based learning and project-based learning in students can use technology as part of an inquiry into a topic. Three significant teaching practices will enhance student learning with technology and they are: interactive learning, the use of technology to explore and create rather than drill and kill, and ultimately, the right blend of teachers and technology. If we want to provide high quality experiential learning, then eService-Learning is definitely the way to go.

When service is incorporated into technology instruction, it can create learning opportunities that are student-centered, collaborative and linked to real-world issues.

**IJRSLTE:** As we come to the end of the interview is there anything else you would like to share that we haven't discussed?

**JS:** When I first started using eService-Learning in 2004, I had no idea what technologies would be available in 2014. Social media has exploded on the

learning stage, and course platforms have eased with maturity. There was no thought about anything going open source and now just about anyone can create some learning experience via video or application.

As K–12 schools grow and more alternative programs become available, it makes sense that students will be using eService-Learning in multiple communities and with multiple partners. When these same students enter higher education, they will want to use this as a learning format.

Community organizations could offer businesses community engagement for their employees by using eService-Learning models in the workplace. Imagine being able to serve right in your office and get work credit for doing so. I believe eService-Learning could be an untapped vehicle for people who are not able to leave their homes. Recently, I created a tutoring program where wheelchair-bound and other people with disabilities could tutor in local elementary schools. The success rate appears to be phenomenal. First-grade students are improving their reading and writing skills while their mentors are improving their social and emotional skills in the community. My participants are enthusiastic that they can make a difference for someone else. Several others would also like to mentor but physically can't leave their place of residence. Imagine the benefit for all students to have daily, consistent tutoring with someone who really wants to spend quality time with them. I see this as something where people with disabilities/limited mobility could also serve their community.

One of my current tutors has been adopted by the entire school community and even has a staff name tag for use at school. She feels like for the first time in her life she has a job and looks forward to helping the children. What this program has done for her self-esteem and belief in her own abilities has really been amazing to watch. If the state or federal agencies could integrate some type of stipend or salary to this tutoring, then many people with disabilities would be greatly helped with additional funding to offset the cost of equipment and medicines. It would be a win-win all around.

Many community organizations don't have the resources to hire individuals to assist them with high-need programs, and this may be one way to fill that void.

As technology continues to improve and our ability to find ways to use it increases, learning will

not be confined to a standard program. Learners will have to learn, unlearn, and relearn new material multiple times throughout their lifetime. eService-Learning would be a great way to assess what learners can gain and provide to others who may need that same skill set.

Using eService-Learning may even help reduce the carbon footprint currently generated through transportation gases and the movement of goods and services. It gives new meaning to using "local" in a global society. eService-Learning also integrates 21st-century skills. Perhaps even more important, eService-Learning enables people to stay connected to issues and communities they are passionate about and want to contribute to, and it gives them a way to do that when they want. Imagine a student who likes to work on projects and service during the early morning hours or very late at night. If that is an optimal time for students to work, why not provide ways to serve when they are at their most productive? Don't we also want to maximize on the skill sets community members have to offer?

**IJRSLTE:** Thank you, Jean. It has been great to hear from a pioneer in the field in the field of eService-Learning. We also will include your graphic, Service-Learning in Online Courses.



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Interview conducted by Kathleen Tice, University of Texas at Arlington [ktice@uta.edu](mailto:ktice@uta.edu)

# SERVICE-LEARNING IN ONLINE COURSES

a decision tree infographic  
beta v. 1.0

People tend to teach the way that they were taught. There are not, however, many faculty members today who have the experience of learning in an online course. This dilemma really gets complicated when people who have had great success using experiential, community-engaged teaching find themselves being asked to teach courses online. This tool is intended to help college and university faculty integrate service-learning into courses taught online. It is not a template, outline or module. Rather, it is a set of questions that can help you to dive into this emerging area for experiential education.

