

I. Research Assistant - Community Service Program

The Setting

The Principal of a High School was interested in developing a program through which students who were 'college-bound' could work with community service organizations and earn credit at the high school level for independent study. He was interested in linking internships with these organizations with the SCANS foundation skills and competencies. He decided to conduct a 'field study' and formed a team of six high school juniors and charged them with the responsibility for identifying and contacting community service organizations who might be interested, designing learning-rich internships of a one-semester's duration with each of the organizations, linking the internships to the SCANS foundation skills and competencies, and presenting a written and oral report of their work.

Comparable Settings

The situation described above exists in virtually any community throughout the United States. Any town of moderate size has a number of community service organizations - hospitals, volunteer groups, and the like -- where such internship opportunities may be found.

The Work

The students began the project by writing a 'confirmation letter' to the Principal articulating their understanding of the project, their work plan, what 'product' they planned to deliver, and their timetable. Then they developed lists of target organizations, developed a concise interview guide, contacted the organizations, interviewed key individuals, and assembled their data. From this information they created over 50 specific internship positions -- all linked to SCANS -- and wrote their final report which included not only descriptions of the internships, but a plan for implementation of a new program at the school, *Community Service 2000*. The plan was implemented in 1993 and has been highly successful -- particularly in attracting the participation of 'college-bound' students who recognize such opportunities to serve their community while gaining valuable skills and competencies on the job.

The Learning

Team members had a valuable learning experience during the course of this project. They learned about resources by managing their time to identify, contact and interview the various community service organizations while conserving time to write and present their report. They learned about information by gathering information from individuals and deciding just what organizations and what individuals could provide the information. They learned about systems by applying a disciplined research process to gather, analyze and present findings as well as developing a process for implementation of the program. They learned about interpersonal skills through working as a team and interacting with individuals whom they needed to interview as well as presenting their report orally. They learned about technology through having to apply their word-processing and desktop publishing skills to sophisticated computer applications to generate their product.