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### Service learning in a postgraduate ethics programme

Service learning or community based learning has become an increasingly popular pedagogy in recent years. It refers to learning by means of an integration of academic learning and students' community experience. Unlike in traditional placements, the goal of the community experience in service learning is not primarily the development of students' professional skills, but a combination of the actual provision of valuable services to the community and the achievement of a deeper understanding of the subject matters addressed in their academic learning through the integration of students' service experience in their academic reflection.

In this paper I will describe the experience with the adoption of a two-semester long service learning module that was piloted in 2006/07 in the MA programme "Ethics, Culture and Global Change" at NUI Galway. In the realisation of this service learning module a number of challenges were faced, including:

- logistical problems relating to the sourcing of suitable service opportunities
- the development of appropriate student preparation and support before and during the service experience
- the question of how to facilitate reflection that will allow for meaningful integration of the philosophical material with the service experience
- the assessment of students' learning and the role of students' service activities in that assessment
- the broader issue of the suitability of service learning the subject area of ethics

I will discuss the rationale behind the course, our initial course design and support structure, the challenges faced in the realisation of the course and the changes that were made following the evaluation of the course, which was based on students' reflection during the course and interviews conducted at the end of the course.