

## INTRODUCTION

The term “case portrait” refers to a snapshot or portrait of a particular program, generated using common case study methods, at a particular point in time (in this case, as of August 2007). What follows is a brief description of how these case portraits were developed and compared.

### **Purpose**

Florida Learn & Serve program staff wanted to be able to articulate and communicate-to school district and school administrators, teachers, community partners, and other interested stakeholders-the components of successful service-learning programs. Case portraits are particularly well suited to this purpose. Consequently, they asked Drs. Noh and Marcinkowski to conduct these case studies and develop these case portraits as part of a contract (2007) between Florida Learn & Serve, K-12 (which is housed at Florida State University’s Center for Leadership and Civic Education, on contract with the Florida Department of Education), and the Florida Institute of Technology.

### **Selection of Exemplary Service-Learning Programs**

In January, Florida Learn & Serve staff provided a list of middle and high school programs that might serve as the focus for these case studies and portraits, drawing upon their own experiences across the state, as well as on recent dissertation studies of service-learning programs in Florida by Athman (2003) and Malikova (2005). On the one hand, all of the candidate programs had to be firmly established and well-organized. On the other hand, everyone involved wanted these candidate programs to reflect the diverse faces of service-learning in Florida by including: (a) both middle and high school programs; (b) school programs operating in different counties and regions of the state; and (c) school programs with activities focusing on a variety of areas (e.g., interdisciplinary, social justice, environmental).

Of the approximately one dozen potential schools that were identified, five were ultimately suitable and available to participate in the case study:

School	Grades	County	Region	Program Origin	Project Emphasis/es
Wilkinson Junior High School	7-8	Clay	Northeast	1995	Environmental
Timber Creek High School	9-12	Orange	Central	2003	Interdisciplinary/Multiple
Neptune Middle School	6-8	Osceola	Central	1997	Interdisciplinary/Multiple
Seven Springs Middle School	6-8	Pasco	West Central	1998	Interdisciplinary/Multiple
Mainland High School	9-12	Volusia	East Central	1992	Environmental/Interdisciplinary

As will be shown, one of the noteworthy findings of these case studies and cross-case comparisons is that many of these school service-learning programs offered projects in multiple areas of emphasis, thereby defying easy classification.

### **Data Collection and Confirmation Methods for Case Portraits**

The coordinator of the service-learning program in each candidate school was contacted to determine if s/he were willing and able to participate in the case study.

- If she or he said “yes,” this coordinator was asked to obtain permission from her/his building principal and from appropriate personnel in the central district office.
- A proposal for the conduct of research involving human subjects was prepared for, submitted to, and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the Florida Institute of Technology.
- For those schools whose coordinators and principals said “yes,” but were located in school districts that required a formal research application, the applications were prepared and submitted to appropriate district personnel.
- Once all necessary approvals were obtained, each coordinator was contacted and asked to work with the researchers to schedule a site visit.
- During this planning period, current and historical documents pertaining to the service-learning program in each school were provided by Florida Learn & Serve (e.g., annual grant proposals and reports), and from each coordinator.
- With permission, the researchers adapted one of the instruments used by Malikova (2005) for use during site visit interviews and focus groups, and began to fill in these instruments prior to each site visit using information from obtained documents.
- Each site visit included an initial interview with the principal and coordinator, an extended interview with each coordinator, interviews with selected teachers involved in each program, and, whenever possible, interviews with representatives of program partners. All program personnel interviewed during site visits were required to complete a multi-part consent form (i.e., consent to participate, consent to allow their name to be used, and consent for the name of the entity they represented to be used).
- Information from documents and interviews was used to draft an initial case outline for each program.
- Each case outline was sent to the respective coordinator for review and comment (i.e., including corrections and additions).
- Case outlines were edited and formatted.

- Each draft case portrait was sent again to the respective coordinator for review and comment.
- Each case portrait was edited and finalized.
- Each final case portrait was sent to the respective coordinator to obtain principal and/or central district office approval.

### **Purpose of, Preparation of, and Confirmation of a Cross-Case Comparison**

These case portraits fulfilled most, but not all, of the purposes of these case studies, which was to depict the major features of exemplary service-learning programs in middle and secondary schools. These case portraits allow the diverse and rich features of each program to be seen in context and as a whole. However, these case portraits are not well suited to summary-type statements about what made these programs exemplary (e.g., commonalities and unique features). Identifying such characteristics requires what researchers commonly refer to as “a comparison of the different cases” or, more simply, a *cross-case comparison*.

Using the draft case portraits, the researchers began to construct a chart in which the different features of each program could be compared (i.e., a cross-case comparison). This cross-case comparison was refined and organized into sections as these case portraits were finalized. Then, as was done with the draft case portraits, this cross-case comparison was circulated to each coordinator for review and comment, corrections, and additions. In this way, the final cross-case comparison presented here reflects both the final and approved case portraits, as well as additional comments from coordinators.

### **Acknowledgments**

While it is true that the preparation and finalization of these case portraits and this cross-case comparison required a lot of work, the researchers came away recognizing that it would not have been possible without the efforts of the program coordinators (“champions” of service-learning), principals, teachers, and students involved in each of these school programs, as well as of the service sites, community partners, donors, and volunteers who support these programs. In other words, if these individuals did not have a shared vision and passion for service-learning, these school programs would not flourish, and may not even exist. In addition, many of the people associated with each school program, particularly the coordinator and principal, spent considerable time with us before, during, and after our site visit(s). Their extensive efforts made these case portraits possible. Beyond this, we were welcomed into these schools and programs, and permitted to inspect and understand them in ways that few “outsiders” can. Lastly, Florida Learn & Serve staff provided substantial support as these school programs were developing, and supported this case study effort. We are extremely grateful to all who made this work possible.