

Service Matters

For students and the communities they work with, service-learning projects have lasting value.

— A conversation with **Edward Zlotkowski**, Professor of English, Founder, Bentley Service-Learning Center; and **Charles Hadlock**, Trustee Professor of Technology, Policy and Decision-Making, Bentley University

Students crave real-world connections. This is the driving idea behind the Service-Learning Center at Bentley. Since its founding more than 20 years ago, students have collaborated with hundreds of public-sector clients—applying their skills and making significant contributions to the community. Here, two pioneers of the service-learning movement discuss its merits.

How does service-learning differ from community service? **EZ:** Service-learning projects are anchored in a set of academic standards. We start with assessable learning objectives and then ask: how can this unfold in a partnership environment?

CH: We enable students to contribute to their communities while connecting their academic backgrounds with real-world challenges. It's a terrific combination.

For example? **CH:** Many of my projects are structured as semester-long, team-based research. My students have helped state and local governments with strategies for a potential flu pandemic, improving the state's competitiveness, business district development and hazardous waste transportation. These are complex projects with economic, political, financial and computational modeling components—resulting in high-value reports for public-sector clients.

You have called this experience transformational. Why?

EZ: Service-learning participants assume a level of responsibility for their work that is fundamentally different. They come into the course thinking of themselves as students and leave thinking of themselves as professionals and as citizens. We often hear "This changed my life."

Is service-learning part of the Bentley DNA? **EZ:** We have pioneered service-learning because we see how it enriches our students' academic experiences, helping them develop into three-dimensional leaders. **CH:** With more than 1,000 participants each year, we're building solid relationships with the community and connecting our students in meaningful ways. Everybody wins.

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