

A Student's guide...
...to Academic Service-Learning



"Service, combined with learning, adds value to each and transforms both." -Honnet and Poulson

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WHAT is Academic Service-Learning and why is it important?

The University of North Carolina Greensboro defines Academic Service-Learning as a teaching method that links community action and academic study so that each strengthens the other. Students, faculty and community partners collaborate to enable students to address community needs, initiate social change, build effective relationships, enhance academic skills and develop civic literacy. Service-Learning encourages critical consideration of the ethical dimensions of community engagement.

Academic Service-Learning is intended to help students gain a better understanding of course content by putting it into practice first-hand. Service-Learning engages students in real life settings, working on community issues in order to connect classroom learning with societal issues. An effective Service-Learning class involves students in a meaningful community project combined with reflection to process the learning gained from field experience.

Wondering WHY you're in a Service-Learning class?

It's because your professor knows that once you leave the classroom, the textbook doesn't just magically come to life. To fully understand, or even be able to question the theories and materials learned in class, it helps to have personal knowledge of it from experience. Once you get involved in a Service-Learning project you're not just memorizing facts for a test, you're living it. The community and you become your own teacher. And sometimes, that means it's harder than memorizing, but far more rewarding. Service and Learning- a powerful combination!

HOW do you connect what you are doing at the agency with what you are learning in the classroom?

Individual professors have their own methods of integrating Service-Learning into the classroom. These may be direct, such as making a brochure, or indirect, such as the experience as a whole. There also will be times when you will have to dig deeper to process and understand the connection between your experience and the classroom material. For more information about this, see the page on WHERE'S THE LEARNING IN SERVICE-LEARNING, and also discuss your experience with your professor and Service-Learning office.

Your responsibility to your Service-Learning Agency Partner

Your agency partner is expecting you to fulfill your obligations of this assignment while providing a needed service to their organization.

You are expected to:

- Attend the agency's orientation session
- Contact the agency to schedule your hours and notify them of any change in your schedule
- Keep track of your service-learning hours
- Contribute to the mission of the organization
- Think about what you are learning from this experience
- Discuss any concerns about your experience with your agency partner and/or your professor
- Contact The Office of Leadership and Service-Learning (256-0538) if you have been unable to resolve any concerns

I will be serving with _____ (organization) and agree to fulfill my obligation of _____ hours.

Signature

Date

When is the agency's orientation?

Orientation date: _____

Orientation time: _____

Location: _____

Bring to orientation: _____

Give the agency partner your contact information (full name, phone number, and email address), and let them know the best way and time to reach you.

Make sure you have the correct contact info. For your agency:

Contact person's full name: _____

Phone number: _____

Email address: _____

What is the best time / method to contact them?

BE RESPONSIBLE for your service and learning. Get invested by learning about the organization and decide what you want to contribute.

KEEP IN TOUCH with your agency contact. Call them immediately if you can not attend as scheduled. Let them know how things are going. Ask questions. Be proactive.

REFLECT on your experience. How does it relate to theories, concepts, and issues you are studying in the classroom? What have you learned? What questions do you have?

WHAT NOW? What will you do with the new information and knowledge you have gained as a result of this experience?

"It is rewarding doing service required for a class which tries to relate the service to course materials. I would say not to look at it so much as a requirement, but actually want to go to the site placement." -student

Where's the LEARNING in Service Learning?

It may not always be clear at first what you should be learning from your Service-Learning experience. After all, life isn't as neat and perfect as textbooks make it sound. This is why reflection is important. You need to spend some time thinking about what you're learning about the organization, the social issue, yourself, and your class. Often, you'll find that the experience or the lesson learned was not what you were expecting. The questions below will help you start thinking about how to find the learning in Service-Learning.

WHAT was I thinking?

Before you start your service, think about your expectations and your stereotypes of the people you'll be working with. Ask yourself what you think you'll get out of this experience.

During your service experience, look at relationships you are building and what effects they are having. Are they meeting the expectations you started with? If not, what can you do about that for the rest of your experience? As you finish your service project, look back on the experience as a whole. What did you learn about this social issue in particular, or society in general? How does this relate to your class? Does your experience support or contradict what you have discussed in class? If you have found a lot of contradiction, discuss that with your professor and classmates to figure out how to reconcile this experience with your previous knowledge. Don't be surprised to find that what you expected was very different from what actually occurred. Often, this is when you'll learn the most if you make an effort to process the experience.

Orientation...

Be there! If your agency partner has an orientation, you are required to attend one of the scheduled times. The orientations have been specifically designed to make it easiest for you and the agency to begin working together. At orientation, you will learn the procedures and expectations of your agency. This is also a good time to schedule your hours if you have not already done so. Be sure to remind your agency partner why you will not be coming due to fall or spring break and other holidays. Inform them of any deadlines such as having a certain number of hours of service completed, validation forms due, etc. Ask about their policies for volunteers.

WHAT?

- What happened? What did you notice?
- What took you by surprise?
- Think of a moment when it was not immediately obvious what to do or say.
- What is the context in terms of the social or political environment?
- Who is being served by this experience?

SO WHAT?

- What did you learn?
- Who were your teachers?
- What impact did it have on how you think and feel? What am I contributing? What am I receiving?
- How does this relate to what we've been reading or discussing in class?

NOW WHAT?

- What decisions will you make based on this experience?
- Will you be involved in this issue in the future?
- What will you do differently next time? How will your learning affect your behavior?
- What are the public policy implications related to this issue?
- What can I contribute to class as a result of this knowledge?

"You don't really know yourself until you can go through a service experience. Seeing your reaction and others' lives really gives you a whole new way of learning."

Community Outreach Etiquette

As you begin your relationship with your community organization, you will probably be eager to get involved and make a difference in the lives of people and in the agencies with which you serve.

As representatives of UOFI, your actions set the tone for an ongoing community/university partnership of which you are an integral part. Although the following guidelines might seem obvious to you, we include them as reminders because they have often distinguished productive and successful experiences from those which were less successful:

- **Ask for help when in doubt**
Your peers, faculty, community partner, and UofI support staff can assist you in determining appropriate ways to respond in difficult situations.
- **Be Punctual and Responsible**
Even though you are volunteering your time, your community partners need to be able to rely on your commitment and punctuality over the entire course of the term.
- **Respect the privacy of all clients**
In the course of your project, you may have access to confidential information. Confidential information can include organizational files, organizational projects in progress, and even clients' personal stories. It is vital that you treat confidential information as privileged, and if you are not certain whether or not some piece of information is to be treated as confidential, ASK.
- **Call if you anticipate lateness or absence**
Community partners will expect follow-through on any commitments you have made and will be at a loss if you don't. Keep them informed of conflicts.
- **Be AWARE**
We all understand that conventions for appropriate dress, verbal and nonverbal communication and rules for appropriate behavior vary across various communities and organizations. You might not always feel comfortable nor always agree with every aspect of your community project. However, maintaining a high level of awareness of your surroundings and, when appropriate, adapting to those surroundings demonstrates respect for those with whom you work.
- **Be flexible**
The level or intensity of activity within a community project is not always predictable. Your flexibility to changing situations assists the project to run more smoothly for everyone involved.

Service-Learning Etiquette, Covenant, and Conduct: A Primer for Students in Service-Learning Courses

- Dress appropriately - remember you are representing UofI.
- **No cell phones** - respect the time you are sharing with others and do not use your cell phone.
- Be aware of your assumptions.
- What are your attitudes about service-learning, your site, your class?
- How will your attitude impede or motivate your success at your site?
- What are your perceptions about your site?
- Be prepared to challenge your assumptions.
- Be prepared to face uncertainty.
- Do not visit your site if you are sick.
- Visit the website and research your site before your first visit.
- Be consistent in your schedule.
- Honor your commitments.
- Be resourceful, proactive, and responsible for your actions.
- Maintain the confidentiality of the people of your site.