

Service Learning as Outreach Scholarship

“Bridging Our College and the Community”

A Guide for Faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences

**Office of Academic Outreach
College of Arts and Sciences
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

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Preface

The following handbook is offered as a tool to assist faculty members in the College of Arts and Sciences who are considering integrating a service learning component into their courses.

This guide is a work in progress. We welcome your suggestions about how we may improve our programs and this guide.

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Scholarship means engaging in original research but also stepping back, looking for connections, building bridges between theory and practice, and communicating one's knowledge effectively to students.

-Ernest L. Boyer-

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UT College of Arts and Sciences Statement on Faculty Guidelines for Service Learning

These guidelines have been reviewed and approved by the deans and department heads of the College of Arts and Sciences, the College Public Service Committee, and the College Policies and Procedures Committee. They are effective Fall Term 1999.

Context

A growing number of faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences are interested in service learning. This document represents an attempt to establish for the faculty and students in the College a common understanding of service learning and to provide guiding principles as well as resources for faculty who wish to incorporate service learning into their courses.

Providing opportunities for students to apply their learning in real world, off-campus settings is not new to higher education. *Practicum, internship, co-operative learning, and experiential learning* are familiar concepts in academe and their meaning is commonly understood.

Such is not the case, however, with the relatively new concept of service learning – academic study linked to community service. While service learning means different things to different people and is defined variously even on the campus of the University of Tennessee, common elements can be identified. These initiatives are sponsored solely by UT, but we have adopted the following standards on service learning as defined by the National and Community service Act of 1990:

Service Learning is a method

- under which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet actual community needs and that are coordinated in collaboration with the educational institution and community;
- that is integrated into the students' academic curriculum and provides structured time for a student to think, talk, or write about what the student did and observed during the service activity;
- that provides students with opportunities to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their own communities; and
- that enhances what is taught in class by extending student learning beyond the classroom and into the community and helps to foster the development of a sense of caring for others.

'Classic' service learning places its major emphasis on student and faculty reflection on the service experience. It is designed to improve teaching and to advance civic consciousness and moral character among students.

--Ira Harkavy, Center for Community Partnerships, University of Pennsylvania

Service learning experiences occur in the context of courses which are part of the approved curriculum and involve faculty and their students in a carefully and thoughtfully designed learning experience with defined learning and experiential goals as part of course requirements. Both service learning and student voluntary community service involve student engagement with the community; however, service learning differs from community service in a number of important ways.

For the College of Arts and Sciences, courses that incorporate service learning should involve the following components:

- **Clear connection between the service learning experience and course objectives**, including specific directions and evaluation criteria for the service component. The learning **must be linked to academic course and content**;
- **Preparation of students for service learning**, including academic training, necessary course pre-requisites, and project specific training;
- Learning occurs through **active participation in a service that addresses a genuine community need**.
- **The experience must be reciprocal in nature**, benefiting both the community and the students by combining a service experience with a learning experience.
- **University/community partnership**: opportunities for student service learning should be negotiated with community organizations/agencies by the appropriate College faculty and/or staff **before student placement**;
- **Appropriately defined scope**: students should be able to complete service learning projects within a semester;
- **Supervision/oversight**: student service learning projects should be jointly supervised by the faculty member and staff from the partnering community organization/agency. Similarly, both the faculty member and community agency staff should share responsibility for mentoring the students;
- **Critical thinking and/or problem solving** should be an element of the assignment;
- **Reflection**: deeper learning should be promoted by requiring students to reflect on the experience in writing through a report, journal, speech, reaction paper, etc. that requires them to relate what they have studied in class with what they have experienced in the community setting;
- **Attention to student safety and liability**: care should be taken to insure that students are not exposed to risk and potential harm. Students have a right to be informed of their exposure to potential risk and liability and should be informed of the required purchase of professional liability insurance;
- **Recognition**: it is important to establish some means of recognizing the value of the students' contributions and demonstrating appreciation for their service and for thanking our community service learning partners.

As an academic unit in a land-grant university with public service and outreach as a distinct element of its mission, the College can benefit from service learning in a number of ways.

- Enables students to experience the relevancy of the curriculum to their lives;

- Helps students clarify values and thereby to develop community and civic responsibility and a sense of individual and collective responsibility;
- Boosts academic achievement;
- Improves student satisfaction with college resulting in higher retention rates;
- Creates stronger faculty/student relationships;
- Improves student social skills;
- Enriches professional learning through work experience preparing students to enter the workplace;
- Helps students develop critical thinking and problem solving skills, i.e. the ability to identify the most important questions or issues within a real world situation.

As a pedagogic practice, service learning offers faculty opportunities for

- interdisciplinary collaboration;
- the occasion to create issue-oriented curriculum;
- the chance to become involved in outreach and action-oriented research.

Finally, service learning encourages the college and university to become actively engaged in the community of which it is a part and to join with its community partners in developing common solutions to complex problems.

As a consequence, community agencies and organizations who host our students have an opportunity to increase their awareness of the College's programs and service, strengthen their capability to meet community needs with the assistance of students, and contribute to the education of UT's students.

Service Learning Resources in the College of Arts and Sciences

For questions regarding support to faculty with student enrollment and orientation; contacts and placements with community agencies, organizations and schools; placement confirmation; placement feedback and enrollment in liability insurance, or our resource library for faculty, please contact

Kim Midkiff, Coordinator of Academic Outreach and Service Learning (865) 974-2047; servlern@utk.edu

For questions regarding Service Learning as part of teaching and syllabus documentation; student liability/safety issues; student engagement; fostering diversity and intercultural experiences, please contact

R. J. Hinde, Associate Dean of Teaching and Diversity

For questions regarding Service Learning as part of the scholarship of outreach and engagement, please contact

Lynn Champion, Director of Academic Outreach and Communications

The Office of Academic Outreach offers resources and support for faculty members who wish to integrate a service learning experience into their coursework.

Please contact the Service Learning Coordinator at servlern@utk.edu for assistance with

- **Enrollment and Tracking:** official service learning enrollment records are kept in the College of Arts and Sciences. All students serving in the community to meet a course requirement **must** be enrolled with the College of Arts and Sciences, Office of Academic Outreach and Communications. Student forms should be on file **before** students begin their service learning projects
- **Orientation:** When students enroll, the Service Learning Coordinator provides a brief orientation, either by coming to your class or by meeting with students individually, to the responsibilities and expectations of service learning. Faculty members may wish to supplement this general orientation with more specific details.
- **Insurance:** The UT Office of Risk Management offers Student Professional Liability Insurance. The College of Arts and Sciences **requires** that students involved in service learning have liability insurance coverage. To be sure students are covered, you may wish to make proof of liability insurance mandatory in your service learning project.

Students may purchase this insurance when they enroll for the service learning project by completing a Service Learning Enrollment Form and remitting a check made payable to the University of Tennessee in the amount of \$38. We are unable to accept debit cards at this time. The Service Learning Coordinator will accept the check and write a receipt that may be used as proof of insurance. For further information about liability insurance see http://www.artsci.utk.edu/outreach/Student_Prof.Liab.Ins.asp

- **Placement Assistance:** The Office of Academic Outreach can provide limited assistance in finding new placement sites for your service learning projects by contacting community agencies, organizations and schools, and can also help students contact sites you have approved for placement.
- **Project Advice:** The Office of Academic Outreach can advise you on the mechanics of your project and work with you to get your questions resolved as you design your project.

Service learning as part of teaching and syllabus documentation can be referred to R. J. Hinde, Associate Dean of Teaching and Diversity.

Student liability and safety issues can be referred to John Zomchick, Associate Dean for Academic Personnel and Affirmative Action.

- **Resource Library:** The growth of academic service learning in colleges and universities has spurred a growth in scholarship about the role of service learning in courses, best practices in the field, and the effects of service learning on students, higher education institutions, and communities. The Office of Academic Outreach

Practicums are courses designed especially for the preparation of students for their professional field that involve the supervised, practical application of previously studied theory. Practicum experiences may occur in **either** non-profit or for-profit organizations, without monetary compensation for the student. In this approach, benefits for the student and community are not balanced. The community may benefit, of course, but the primary goal is to offer students the opportunity to practice professional skills. No reflection would occur regarding community need, academia's relation to it, or civic responsibility.

Internships are the actual participation of students in their professional field and, like practicums, may be in either non-profit or for-profit organizations, also without monetary compensation for the students. As a bridge between academia and the profession, involvement in an internship helps students clarify their career choice. Their service involves not just developing skills but implementing their academic training, sometimes in exchange for wages. The primary goal of an internship is to train students professionally and to allow them to apply their educational skills as a budding professional. Community benefit may be a by-product of their experience but not the focus, and often no opportunities for structured reflection will follow the service.

Service Learning is something students engage in **only** if they are enrolled in a class in which the instructor has included a service learning component that provides contextual learning opportunities that **may or may not be related to a student's career choice**. Service learning activities are designed in a way that permits students to formulate an understanding of the course content within the context of the world around them. The defining attribute of service learning is its equal emphasis on meeting community needs and academic objectives. Service experiences are carefully coordinated to engage students in activities that benefit them by enhancing their understanding of the course content and also benefit the community by providing needed services. The development of civic responsibility among students, rather than particular professional skills, is a primary goal of service learning. Another key difference is that **students involved in service learning are always assigned in community non-profit organizations** rather than private for-profit enterprises.

In summary, all of the above examples may appear similar, but the intent and outcomes for the community and the student differ dramatically.

Students engaged in service learning can be, but are not always, developing skills for their professional field. One might think of service learning as a general education goal, even if it happens to take place in the student's professional field.

Through the service learning experience, untrained students gain a deeper understanding of the content of a particular course and its application to real-life situations, develop social and ethical values through structured reflection, and aid the community through service.

Service learning done well is reciprocal in nature, offering numerous benefits to all parties involved. By extending the classroom into the community, both students and community members can examine the relevance of higher education to public life and work to address matters of mutual concern.

Not every course is suitable for service learning. Evaluate your course not only in terms of the content provided but also the concepts and skills taught. **Be honest in making sure there is a real academic connection between the service and your course material.** Take into account the possible applications of your course to the students taking it. Occasionally in some fields, service learning may have little direct relevance to the material being taught but may be a useful way to enable students to master content or concepts, apply skills, or explore career-related possibilities.

Consider also the time you are willing to devote to making the service learning project succeed. Service learning can be more time-consuming than traditional assignments, and with the greater risk involved in sending students into the community for service, careful planning before the beginning of the semester is required to create the structure necessary for a safe and successful project. You may want to make preliminary visits to the placement agencies to ensure that their missions and standards are compatible with requirements for the service learning project. Other time commitments may arise from assigning reflective journals or papers, dealing with student concerns and other issues.

Finally, reflect upon the compatibility of a service learning project with your pedagogical style and values. Service learning often highlights the role of faculty as mentors as they oversee their students' service, encourage reflection on their learning, discuss their observations, and evaluate their experiences. You may feel compelled to model service learning yourself. Also, service learning can often prove to be more unpredictable than traditional assignments. Although some faculty may find these shifts in roles and expectations refreshing, others may find them intimidating.

Requirement or Option?

Some instructors choose to make the service learning project optional rather than requiring all students in the course to participate. Among the reasons for doing so are transportation difficulties, schedule conflicts and risk/liability concerns for students. Students who choose not to do the service learning project, might, for example, be required to write a research paper in lieu of participating.

Your choice as to whether service learning is required or optional will have an impact on how you devote classroom time to it. If the project is optional, it is unfair to students who are not participating in the project to spend large portions of the class period discussing the service learning experience. Students who do not participate in an optional service learning project must not be penalized or sidelined for choosing the non-service option.

If the project is required, one way to accommodate students who have difficulties serving off-campus because of transportation or schedule issues is to design suitable alternative service learning experiences on campus or near campus, within walking distance.

Planning the Project

Consider how you can design a service learning experience to best meet the needs of your students and the community in ways that would benefit both parties. The shape of your project will be influenced by the resources of the local community but may not necessarily be limited by them. Some organizations may be interested in developing new initiatives if they can expect reliable participation from service learning students. As you plan, consider the actual capabilities of students and community groups: It is easy to think big but more challenging to make a new initiative succeed.

- **Selecting appropriate placement opportunities** for your students requires planning well in advance of your project.
 - **Do not send students out to make their own independent arrangements** as confusion can occur when schools or agencies do not expect the calls or mistake your service learning project for other internships or volunteer initiatives involving other groups from UT, jeopardizing faith and goodwill for all of them.
 - **Visit the potential placement sites and meet with the supervisors** to establish a personal connection with school or agency staff and ensure that the placement is safe and appropriate for your students. Not all schools or agencies can accommodate service learning students and it is unreasonable to expect them to find appropriate tasks on short notice for short-term volunteers who may not be a good fit with their operations.
 - **Also contact and screen placement sites that might be suggested by students** before the students attempt to make any arrangements themselves.
 - **It is the duty of faculty members to inform students of the potential risks at their placement sites. Avoid placements that present significant risks of criminal activity or physical danger.** Organizations that already have clearly established procedures for working with volunteers tend to offer the most reliable and rewarding experiences to students. Placement sites need to provide adequate screening, orientation, supervision, evaluation, and record keeping for all students serving with them.
 - **Confirm the kinds of tasks the students will be performing** at the site and that the tasks correspond with the learning objectives of the project and fulfill community needs, not the immediate needs of the placement site. Tasks should involve critical thinking and problem solving that will be meaningful and appropriate for the students' projects.

- **Students must never be involved in transporting clients, particularly in personal vehicles.**
- **Give students clear guidelines about their proper roles as service learning students at their placement sites,** and be attentive to claims of exploitation. Encourage students to be forthcoming to you and their site supervisors about troubles at their placements while advising them to steer clear of interpersonal disputes.
- **Clearly define the number of service hours required (minimum and maximum) as well as the total number of visits students are expected to make to their placement sites.** The number of hours of service should correspond appropriately to the percentage service learning counts toward the final class grade. Remember that students will also have to devote time and expense for transportation while participating in the project.
- **Student reflection is key to the concept of service learning.** The aim is for students to explore the relationships between their field experience and the material they have studied in class. Guiding students with strategies of thinking deliberately about their service is just as necessary as guiding them to think about material in their readings or lectures. A substantial portion of students' reflection should be done through individual writing. Assignments such as journals, reaction papers, weekly reports, or speeches are a few of the possibilities. Group reflection through projects or discussions should also be encouraged as part of the emphasis on a learning community. Reflection should move beyond summary of the experience to consider the students' service in relation to larger issues, particularly those academic concepts being taught in the course.
- **Develop good mechanisms to evaluate the quality as well as the quantity of student participation in the service learning project.** You can make your role in grading service learning projects easier by being as clear and specific as possible about requirements. Set minimum standards for attendance, hours and assignments and be sure to specify what is necessary beyond those minimum to excel at the project. Also establish a maximum amount of service that will be allowed to count for credits. Students should not be rewarded simply for serving a great number of hours, but should be graded on the quality of their work within the assigned parameters. You may wish to seek site supervisor and peer evaluations, particularly when working with group projects. As part of the overall experience of the course, the weight of the service learning project and its various evaluative components as a portion of the total grade should be balanced and fair.
- **Recognition is also an important component to maintaining healthy service learning partnerships.** Contact schools or agencies where your students have served to thank them for providing a service learning opportunity. Making others aware of what your students are doing in the community will raise the profile of your course, your department, the

College, and the University. Please feel encouraged to share information about your service learning projects with the Office of Academic Outreach. Your reports, formal or informal, are valuable for assessing the status of service learning in the College of Arts and Sciences and for recognizing faculty and students involved in community outreach through service learning.

What to Include on Your Syllabus

The role of the syllabus as a course contract between instructor and students is particularly important in a course with a service learning element. Giving substantial information about service learning at the beginning of the course will prevent many blunders, delays, and misunderstandings. If service learning is only a portion of the course, the service learning project should be discussed early in the course so students have an opportunity to arrange alternatives if they are unwilling or unable to participate.

Necessary information to include:

- **Statement about how the service learning project relates to the goals of the course.**
- **Timetable for important deadlines such as when to:**
 - elect to participate in service learning project
 - Turn completed enrollment forms into the Office of Academic Outreach
 - Purchase student liability insurance
 - Contact placement agency or school
 - Start service in a placement
 - Confirm placement
 - Hand in assignments related to the service learning project
- **Expectations for service:**
 - Number of hours/visits required (minimum and maximum)
 - Nature of students' duties
 - Procedures for documenting service
 - Requirements for carrying liability insurance
- **Expectations for learning:**
 - Guidelines for reflective projects (journals, response essays, reports, presentations, etc.)
 - Criteria for grading students' service and reflective projects
- **Contact information for enrolling with College of Arts and Sciences Academic Outreach Office:** Kim Midkiff, Service Learning Coordinator
Rm # 4, Alumni Memorial Building
servlern@utk.edu to schedule appointment

Sample Timetable for Faculty

(Assuming 1-3 hours per week for approximately 10-12 weeks. Your schedule may vary)

Several weeks before semester begins:

- Design your project
- Consult with Office of Academic Outreach if you would like assistance
- Contact and visit potential placement sites to arrange service learning partnerships
- Become familiar with procedure and forms related to service learning in the College of Arts and Sciences
- Contact Service Learning Coordinator to schedule class time to meet with your class for orientation and service learning enrollment.
- Include service learning project information on or along with course syllabus.

First week of class:

- Distribute information on service learning project; discuss requirements, deadline, and procedures.
- Have class presentation from Service Learning Coordinator for orientation and enrollment and/or refer students to Office of Academic Outreach for enrollment, orientation, and payment of student liability insurance premium

Third or fourth week of class:

- have students contact placements and make initial visits
- remind students to get placement confirmation forms completed and returned

Fifth week of class:

- Make sure students are established in their placements; start reflective projects

Middle of project/semester:

- Check progress with students and their site supervisors.
- Service Learning Coordinator will also provide information regarding which students' placement confirmation postcards have been received.

Two to three weeks before end of project:

- Remind students how to end their placements and complete their reflective project
- Distribute any evaluation forms you wish site supervisors to complete

At end of project:

- Collect reflective projects, time logs
- Collect any evaluation forms you may have distributed to students or supervisors
- Grade projects
- Allow time in class to assess service learning experiences
- Thank community partners for providing service learning opportunities to students

Enrolling Students

If you are incorporating service learning into a course, you must have all students who take part in the project enrolled with the Office of Academic Outreach as participants in a service learning experience **before** placement at a community site. **They must also purchase professional liability insurance at the time of enrollment.** Students cannot be sent forth to serve without an understanding of what is involved in their service, or without their instructor and the Office of Academic Outreach knowing which students are participating – and where.

When students enroll, they will be asked to complete the **Enrollment Form**
<http://www.artsci.utk.edu/outreach/pdfs/StudentEnrollmentFrmSL05-06.pdf>

On which they provide contact information for themselves and an emergency contact person, state the course in which they are participating, indicate they understand they must purchase liability insurance, and read and sign a legal agreement about the terms of participating in a course-related service learning project.

Three documents are available to facilitate the placement and orientation processes:

1. ***Guidelines for Students***
<http://www.artsci.utk.edu/outreach/pdfs/StudentGuidelinesSL05-06.pdf>
which contains a brief summary of the primary responsibilities of students in service learning settings, as well as a description of the insurance coverage students purchase through the UT Office of Risk management. You may wish to supplement these guidelines with your own course-specific ones.
2. ***Service Learning Referral form***
<http://www.artsci.utk.edu/outreach/pdfs/Referral-ConfirmationSL05-06.pdf>
which should be taken by the students to their placement sites. This form gives guidelines to the host placement site to help make the service learning experience safe and beneficial to both parties. It also gives pertinent contact information, including student emergency contact information, site to the student's supervisor.
3. ***Placement Confirmation Postcard***
<http://www.artsci.utk.edu/outreach/pdfs/Postcard.pdf>
which students have their supervisors sign and date and mail back (postage prepaid) to the Office of Academic Outreach to provide positive confirmation that students have begun their service and that supervisors agree to direct their projects. Students may also hand-deliver the signed confirmation postcards to the Service Learning Coordinator at 26 Alumni Memorial Building.

Mandatory Liability Coverage

The professional liability risks for students that can occur when they are off-campus on a service learning project should not be underestimated. Any off-campus experience entails an extra degree of risk, but service learning, where students who do not have extensive professional training often work directly with children and/or clients, involves greater exposure to situations where issues of liability can arise. Faculty and staff, as UT employees, enjoy protection by the university against professional liability, but students do not. Students wanting to help make a difference in the community often overlook the potential risks or take too lightly the possibility that liability issues could affect them. For this reason, **students are required to purchase Professional Liability Insurance.**

The federal government passed the *Volunteer Protection Act of 1997* to shield well-intentioned volunteers from many of the liability risks facing them. But the Act only protects volunteers under certain conditions. For more information see

<http://www.artsci.utk.edu/outreach/pdfs/VOLUNTEER%20PROTECTION%20ACT%20OF%201997.pdf>

In recognition of the risks involved, the Office of Academic Outreach in the College of Arts and Sciences requires all students to purchase Professional Liability Insurance. The UT Office of Risk Management makes coverage available to students (\$38.00 annually for a million dollar policy). The Office of Academic Outreach can enroll students in this coverage and process their payments. See also

http://www.artsci.utk.edu/outreach/Student_Prof.Liab.Ins.asp