

# Student Guidelines for Service Learning

University of Tennessee, College of Arts and Sciences

Welcome to your service learning experience. Thank you for enrolling. As you work in the community to help others and strengthen your own education, you also provide an opportunity for people to discover more about the people and programs at the University of Tennessee. To help make the experience as safe, beneficial, and positive as possible for you and everyone involved, please read carefully the guidelines listed below and follow them during your service. Remember that these are only starting points; your instructor may have further guidelines. Always do your best to act professionally and courteously.

If you have any questions about your service, please see your instructor or contact the Coordinator of Service Learning at 974-2047 or servlern@utk.edu. Enjoy your project!

**What Is Service Learning?** - Service learning is a hands-on teaching tool, a method of experiential education which attempts to strengthen ties between theory and practice by placing students into service in the community. Students actively participate in thoughtfully organized service experiences that allow them to apply the skills and knowledge they are acquiring to meet real community needs. The service experience is integrated into the academic curriculum of the course, with students using structured time and assignments to think, talk, and write about how their service activities relate to their studies. 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. In addition to the resulting benefits to the community, recent studies have suggested that enhanced academic performance, better student retention, and more active citizenship are among the benefits of service learning to students.

To find out more about service learning in the UT College of Arts and Sciences, please visit the College's service learning website at: [http://www.artsci.utk.edu/outreach/service\\_learning.asp](http://www.artsci.utk.edu/outreach/service_learning.asp).

**Professional Liability** - Almost any off-campus learning experience entails an extra degree of risk, but service learning, in which students who do not have extensive professional training often work directly with clients or children, involves greater exposure to situations where issues of professional liability can arise. The UT College of Arts and Sciences requires that students involved in service learning have professional liability insurance coverage. Professional liability insurance is especially important for students working with children. Although the federal government enacted the Volunteer Protection Act of 1997 to limit much of the liability of volunteers not engaged in deliberate wrongdoing or gross negligence, the act does not prohibit civil lawsuits or eliminate the risk of incurring costly legal fees in defending against lawsuits, even those that eventually may be dismissed.

**All service learning students must purchase a professional liability insurance policy.**

In addition to the many private organizations and companies offering professional liability policies, the UT Office of Risk Management offers Student Professional Liability Coverage to students engaged in a UT directed educational activity related to their professional fields:

The insurance covers all locations on and off campus, with limits of \$1,000,000 per claim and \$6,000,000 per annual aggregate per student.

The annual premium of \$38.00 covers the period from June 1, 2008 to May 31, 2009.

You may purchase this insurance through the Office of Academic Outreach when enrolling for the service learning project by making a check payable to the University of Tennessee for the proper amount. Your receipt will serve as proof of enrollment in this group policy; upon request from your placement, the Office of Risk Management can also provide you a certificate of insurance.

**Starting Your Placement Well** - A courteous and professional first contact with a school or agency can go a long way toward making your service learning experience successful:

#### **Contacting the School or Agency:**

In most courses you will be given contact information for potential placement sites by your instructor or the service learning coordinator. **Do not make independent arrangements without the approval of your instructor or the service learning coordinator.** Making "cold calls" to area schools and agencies causes confusion.

Please remember that many school and agency personnel have busy schedules, and it may take several tries to reach them. If you cannot reach the designated contact person at the school or agency, please see your instructor or the service learning coordinator immediately. **Do not try to arrange your placement with other people at the placement site.**

When calling the school or agency, identify yourself as a University of Tennessee student involved in a service learning project as part of your coursework (you may need to explain briefly what service learning is).

State the name of your instructor and the title of the course you are taking.

Give a brief description of your goals: what course objectives you need to fulfill, how many hours/visits per week or semester you will have available, and the dates by which your service must begin and end.

If leaving a voice mail message, be sure to leave your phone number and the best time to return your call.

Be polite and concise, and be sure to leave appropriate lead time (do not call on Monday expecting to start on Tuesday).

### **Making the First Visit**

Be sure you have clear directions to the site so you can arrive promptly. You will need to supply your own transportation. Bring contact information along with you.

You should be given a basic orientation to the school or agency and be introduced to people who will be relevant to your service learning experience.

Confirm that you understand procedures and tasks correctly, and be sure to ask any questions you may have.

If you feel the placement is unsafe or unsuitable for the requirements of your service learning project, please contact your instructor or the service learning coordinator.

**Responsibilities during Your Service** - Treat your service learning placement as you would a job. Be responsible and professional. Some specific guidelines:

**Be punctual.** Arrange your placement schedule to allow you plenty of travel time. Always call if you anticipate being late or absent. Remember that people are relying on you to be there at a specific time and may be depending on you for specific tasks.

**Be safe.** You have the right to be informed of known potential dangers, including criminal activity, at or near your placement site. Be cautious when traveling to and from your placement site, and follow any safety procedures required or recommended at your placement site.

**Dress appropriately.** Follow the dress code of your placement site.

**Keep records.** Sign in and out at your placement site (Knox County Schools require all visitors to sign in and out at principal's office, and many require visitor badges to be worn). Maintain a log of your hours and activities. Be sure that your supervisor also has an accurate account of your hours and activities: he or she will be reporting on them during the semester.

**Be open and honest.** Share your learning objectives with the supervisor and others working with you at your placement site. Never make promises or commitments that you cannot keep.

**Ask for advice when in doubt.** Contact your supervisor, your instructor, or the Service Learning office with questions about your placement or your duties.

**Protect privacy and confidentiality.** If you are privy to confidential information about others (files, personal stories, diagnostics, etc.), you must treat it as privileged information and follow all standards of ethics that apply. Check with your instructor and your placement supervisor about permission to use such information and the procedures for doing so (using pseudonyms, etc.). Do not take photographs without permission.

**Cultivate respectful relationships.** Treat all people with dignity. Never engage in, or tolerate from others, verbal exchanges or behavior that might be perceived as sexual or discriminating against an individual on the basis of age, race, gender, or handicap. Protect your own privacy: do not go into details about your private life. Avoid gossip. Be mindful of the potential emotional attachment to you that some children or clients can develop.

**Supervision:** Service learning students must always be directly supervised by a teacher or administrator, and must not be left alone with a student or client at any time.

**Ending Your Service Learning Project** - How you leave is important for the success of your project and the long-term benefit of future service learning students:

Inform your supervisor several weeks in advance that your term of service is coming to an end. Gently inform children or clients a well.

Express your appreciation for the opportunity of serving with the program, and discuss the highlights of what you have learned or appreciated during your service.

**Be sure that supervisors are aware of any forms or evaluations they must return.**

Supervisors at your service learning placement can make excellent future job references; ask for letters recommendation while they have you fresh in their memories.