

Part Three: Your Service-Learning Experience

It is not uncommon for a person to begin their placement with specific expectations and ideas of what their experience will entail. It is important to remember that your agency has similar expectations about your role within their organization. Furthermore, uncertainty or nervousness is common when beginning a service-learning commitment (or anything else that is new!). The following reminders should help you with any concerns that you might have while also helping you to understand what most organizations expect of you:

Do:

- Ask for help if you need it—you don't have to be an expert your first day!
- Learn about your organization, the community it serves and environment in which it is located.
- Communicate with your agency supervisor and with your professor.
- Be safe! Ask your supervisor where you can park your car; place your personal items and how to complete your service to minimize risk (see "Serving Safely").
- Communicate any potential problems or worries to your professor in a timely manner. If you aren't learning through your placement she/he should know!
- Keep an accurate log of the service-learning hours you have completed, and sign in and out with your supervisor.
- HAVE FUN! Service-learning can be a fun and exciting experience, if you make it so!

Avoid:

- Being late, missing appointments or being absent without proper notice.
- Driving any client or agency representative in your personal vehicle.
- Dressing and/or behaving in an unprofessional manner. You are a representative of your professor, department, and CSULB!

NEVER, under any circumstance, condone violent, harassing or discriminatory acts toward you or any other person. If you feel your rights have been violated, contact Carina Sass, Associate Director for the Center for Community Engagement, at: (562) 985-2376 or csass@csulb.edu.

"No act of kindness, no matter how small is ever wasted...." Aesop

Maintaining Confidentiality

It is critical that you always recognize the importance of maintaining confidentiality. Convey respect and affirm the worth of all with whom you come into contact by keeping confidential any personal information that may be disclosed to you during your service.

If it is necessary to discuss an individual as part of a class discussion or written assignment centering on your service-learning experience, be sure to:

- Utilize an "alias" when referring to others (avoid using the person's actual name).
- Eliminate identifying characteristics.
- Suppress details about the individual's personal background. You can discuss a general history of abuse, for example. Simply avoid using details about "whom," "when," and "where."

The following circumstances are exceptions to these rules of confidentiality:

- The individual has threatened to physically harm her or him self or another person, and/or
- The individual has disclosed physical and/or sexual abuse or neglect by a caregiver.

In these instances you have a legal and ethical responsibility to approach your agency supervisor with the information so that she/he can follow through with appropriate reporting procedures. When working with vulnerable populations you are obligated by law to report information pertaining to the above circumstances, even if it is only an educated suspicion.

Serving Safely

Identify potential risks by asking yourself and the agency the following types of questions:

- What kinds of risks (to myself, to clients, to others) are there to my service-learning *activity*? For example, does the activity include physical activity (recreation, construction, etc.), or does it include working with a “vulnerable” population (children, elderly, disabled)?
- What kinds of risks are there in the *environment* in which you will be doing service-learning? For example, is the building in good condition, is the surrounding neighborhood relatively crime-free or is there a higher-than-average rate of crime?

Respond proactively by making sure that:

- The agency provides a safety orientation, training on any unfamiliar equipment, and provides information on what to do in case of an emergency.
- You report clearly unsafe conditions outside your control to the agency, and if necessary, to your professor
- You carry appropriate health and auto insurance
- You take appropriate precautions to keep yourself and your possessions safe from crime
- You follow all laws and agency policies.
- You avoid activity that is beyond your physical capabilities or training
- You avoid being alone and unsupervised with a minor and/or a disabled or elderly person.
- You avoid giving out personal information and/or establishing personal relationships with those you serve.

Injuries During Service

Although most non-profit agencies have insurance for the safety of their staff and volunteers, some do not. As mentioned earlier, the *CSULB Community Service Learning—Learning Plan* will need to be completed before your service is started to establish a standard of service that is understood by all participating parties in your placement. This document also serves to insure that you are covered in case of an accident or emergency as a direct result of your service. When complete with signatures, you, the agency, and your professor should each keep a copy. You will also be asked to keep an accurate log of the hours you spend at your organization. This document will not only serve as documentation that you have completed the required time commitment but will also show the hours that you were under the responsibility and supervision of the community agency.

There are risks associated with nearly every aspect of daily life. A person could slip in the shower, stub their toe while running barefoot, or have their car burglarized in front of their house. The risks of everyday activity are minimized when one identifies the risk (a wet shower floor can be slippery), and responds proactively (put a rubber mat in the shower). When a student begins a service-learning placement, he/she needs to identify any potential risks and respond proactively to insure a safe experience.

Sometimes, accidents just happen. If you are hurt during your service activity but is not a direct result of service, it is important that you have personal access to medical care. All full-time CSULB students can receive minor to moderate health care free of charge at Student Health Services. Part-time students can pay a small health fee for these services. The CSLC strongly recommends that all students maintain health insurance, either independently or through the A.S. sponsored student health coverage plans.

In the event of an injury, always remember to:

- ◆ **Contact the agency and your professor,**
- ◆ **Seek appropriate medical care,**
- ◆ **Contact Carina Sass, CSULB CCE Associate Director, at (562) 985-2376, and**
- ◆ **File appropriate paperwork with your agency, if applicable.**