

Community Service Learning at CSULB: A Student Handbook



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Part One: Community Service Learning

This handbook is designed to aid you in the completion of the service-learning component of your course. We hope that the following information will help you to have a successful service-learning experience. By taking this course you have become part of a unique group of individuals who choose a positive approach to giving back to their communities.

Who We Are

The mission of the Center for Community Engagement is to serve as a facilitative partner and resource for faculty, students and community members in strengthening community capacity, building social and political capital, enriching the educational experience of students, and facilitating shared community-based research through the coordination of civic engagement, effective service learning, and community collaborations.

What is Service-Learning?

Service-learning is the integration of community service into an academic course. It is a method of teaching and learning that allows students to see and experience the relationship between theory and practice as they draw together their community service experience with readings, lecture, research, and classroom discussion. Service-learning :

- Links academic study to community service through intentional learning goals and structured reflection to enhance both learning and service
- Emphasizes active learning in different environments
- Values reciprocity, with the community and academic partners sharing the roles of learner, server, and educator to meet both academic and community goals.
- Engages students in responsible and challenging community service that meets identified community needs
- Allows students to reflect critically on their experiences
- Is *integrated* into the course and not an “add-on” or extra work. Service-learning faculty design courses so that the out-of-class time required for a service-learning course is equivalent to that required for a non-service-learning course.
- It is *not* receiving credit for doing community service. You will be graded on the learning related to the service, not on the service itself.

Service-Learning Benefits Everyone

Students who complete Community Service Learning benefit from:

- Richer learning opportunities, increased information retention, and higher grades
 - Opportunities to apply classroom knowledge to real experience in the community
 - Increased academic and social self-confidence
 - Increased critical thinking skills
 - Greater awareness of community opportunities and the chance to develop community networks
 - Increased sense of community “connectedness” and civic engagement
 - Enriched experiences that strengthen resumes and graduate school applications
- Community-based organizations involved with service learning and their constituents gain:
 - Tangible benefits from student community service-learning activities.
 - The possibility to address needs that require specialized knowledge.
 - Opportunities to develop ongoing partnerships with university students and faculty that can help address longer-range goals.
 - Opportunities to serve as “co-educators” in guiding and supporting service-learners.



Service-Learning Checklist

✓	Date Completed	Activities
		Read syllabus & understand service-learning assignment
		Attend the CSULB In-Class or General Service-Learning Orientation
		Receive & review list of approved community agencies Make a selection based upon your interests and availability
		Contact the organization, submit agency application, and register for a project and orientation via the <i>Service Learning Database</i>
		Complete screening process (TB test, fingerprinting, etc.), if required
		Complete agency orientation and/or training
		Complete Service Learning Plan via the <i>Service Learning Database</i> and provide a signed copy to: _____ agency _____ instructor _____ yourself
		Record your service hours in a personal log or in <i>Service Learning Database</i> Student/Project Timer and in any agency-required time sheets.
		Reflect upon your experience as it relates to your course and yourself (use a reflection log or other format as required by your professor)
		Mid-semester: with your agency supervisor, review the progress you have made toward your learning and service activity goals.
		Participate in workshops and/or events supported or sponsored by the Center for Community Engagement
		Near end of semester, provide appropriate “closure” with the agency and others with whom you serve
		Schedule a time with the agency supervisor to review your performance, including degree to which learning and service activity goals were met
		Provide the agency with copies of any reports or other “products” of your service. Invite the agency representative to attend class presentations
		Complete the “Evaluation of Service Learning and Agency Placement” survey

“We never get to the bottom of ourselves on our own. We discover who we are face to face and side by side with others in work, love, and learning...” Robert Bellah, Sociologist and author of *Habits of the Heart*

Placement Information

Agency Name & Address _____

Agency Contact _____ Phone _____ Email _____

Your Service Schedule _____

Center for Community Engagement, East Library/Academic Services Room 121 (562) 985-7131 www.csulb.edu/cee

Part Two: Getting Started

Most service-learning courses require a specific number of service hours, generally a minimum of 20 hours, which must be completed throughout the entire semester (in other words, one cannot wait until the end of the semester and try to get all the hours in at once). It is your responsibility as a student to choose an appropriate community agency in which to complete your service. Your professor will provide a list of appropriate community organizations and/or appropriate service activities. Once you have received that information you will need to do the following in a timely manner:

Choose a Community Agency

One of the most important parts of a service-learning experience is choosing the right placement. The agencies listed for your course were identified based upon the match between the course objectives and the community needs. The agencies approved by your professor have been contacted and are looking forward to working with students in your class. But how do you choose between them? Before you make any attempts to contact the agency, try to assess your fit with the community partner in the following ways:

- **Location.** Are you able to get to the agency? Will you be able to drive, use public transportation, or walk?
- **Hours.** Are you able to serve during the agencies hours? Pay attention to both the days and times the agency is open and when they need volunteers.
- **Cause.** Consider choosing an agency that addresses a cause or issue in which you are particularly interested or an issue that you would like to learn about. If there is a web page listed, visit the site to learn more about the agency.
- **Requirements of the agency.** Is the agency looking for a specific type of person? Not everyone can complete service at every agency. Agencies may request a specific type of student (e.g. particular majors, willing to make a long-term commitment, or those with previous experience with a similar agency). Some have minimum age requirements (often 18 or 21 years), and others cannot accept individuals with certain types of criminal records. If there are no provisions listed for the agency or you are not sure if you fit their requirements, be sure to talk with the agency contact person.

Contact the Community Agency

Once you have identified an agency, it is important to contact the agency to set the application process in motion. It is critical that you complete all agency application forms and procedures fully and in a timely manner. The screening and training that is required before placement by many agencies can take several weeks, and missing forms and/or delays on your part can make it difficult, if not impossible, for you to successfully complete the service-learning requirement of your class. This would ultimately affect your success in the course.

It is also important for you to follow up with the agency. Do not be afraid to be proactive! If an agency contact person is unavailable when you call, ask for the best time and way to reach him or her. It is also important to leave a detailed message. If you cannot reach the individual in person, leave your name, purpose of the call, and how and when they can best reach you. If you leave a message and do not hear back from the contact person within 24-48 hours, try calling again. If there are other methods of contacting the agency (i.e., e-mail addresses, fax numbers), you should attempt those as well. If you have tried to contact the agency using all available means and still are not able to make contact with the agency, notify your professor and/or the Center for Community Engagement as soon as possible. Remember, non-profit organizations are often short staffed and extremely busy. Always, therefore, call during the hours of operation listed on your contact sheet.



Complete Required Procedures

Once you have contacted and committed your semester of service to an agency, it is important that you meet all their requirements. Application forms, background checks, orientations, and/or training must be completed and/or reviewed before your first day of service. Failure to complete required tasks before your start date will delay your beginning of service. It is essential, therefore, that you know exactly what is required, and when.

The requirements of the agency may be especially rigid if your learning placement will involve working with what is considered to be a “vulnerable population.” This term is generally used for those who are under the age of 18, disabled, and/or elderly. If your service involves working with any person who is part of a vulnerable population, the organization may require that you get a background check, DMV report and/or TB test before you begin service. Such precautions are state mandated to protect the individuals you will serve as well as for your own protection. Always ask the agency where you need to go to complete testing to ensure speedy processing, and how long it will take for clearance. Background checks can take as little as one to two days, but can also be delayed as long as a month! This is generally outside of the agency’s control, but obviously can have a serious impact on your ability to successfully complete your service-learning. This is one reason to not delay in your application process.

CSULB Requirements. In addition to the agency application process, you are also required to complete all registration steps in the *Service Learning Database*. (Remember to print copies of completed Emergency Contact Information Forms and Community Service Learning Plans, for yourself, your professor and the agency you are working with.) Completing these registration steps serves to:

- Provide you, your professor, and the community agency a common understanding of the learning objectives relating to your service and agreed-upon service activities and responsibilities.
- Provide the agency and your professor with emergency contact information
- Provide you with guidelines relating to your placement.

The agency, you, and your professor should agree upon the learning objectives and service activities. All three parties should sign the Learning Plan, and all should keep copies of the Plan. The Learning Plan is Step 4 in the registration process in the *Service Learning Database* and must be completed prior to your first day of service.

If not required, you are strongly encouraged to attend the CSULB “Preparation for Service-Learning” workshop during the first few weeks of the semester, as well as other workshops and activities sponsored by the Center for Community Engagement. Visit the Center for Community Engagement’s website for the current schedule of workshops (<http://www.csulb.edu/cce>).

TB (Tuberculosis) Screening

This is a simple, two-step process that can be done at the CSULB Health Resource Center for a small charge (approximately \$2). The test is placed on your arm, then you return within 72 hours to be checked for any reaction. That’s all!

If you have ever received a positive TB test, you must obtain a chest x-ray instead of the TB skin test.

Testing positive does not necessarily mean you have TB! Most often, it means you have been exposed at some time in your life and your body carries TB antibodies.

For more information, contact the CSULB Student Health Resource Center at (562) 985-4609

Criminal Background Checks are required in some instances by state law. If the agency asks about any convictions and you have a criminal record:

- Be honest. Failure to state convictions that are then uncovered in a background check will likely result in your immediate dismissal from your service organization.
- Ask the agency representative to explain what types of convictions are not acceptable (these often involve convictions such as those involving violence, drug sales, and/or crimes against minors).
- If you believe that your record will disqualify you from a particular service-learning placement, it would be wise to pursue another placement option.
- If you would not be accepted at any of the approved placements sites, discuss alternative placement options with your professor. You do not need to share the details of your conviction with your professor.

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!
- 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 complete and sign in and out with your supervisor.
- The level or intensity of activity at a service site is not always predictable; be flexible.
- 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 *Community Service Learning* must be submitted and signed **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 CCE strongly recommends that all students maintain health insurance, either independently or through the Associated Students 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**
- ◆ **File appropriate paperwork with your agency, if applicable.**

Part Four: Getting the Most Out of Your Service

Working in a new environment can be exciting, interesting and incredibly rewarding. Students who become actively engaged in the environment and processes of their service learning placement can find themselves gaining rich learning experiences that cannot be obtained within the context of a classroom. With that in mind, students can enhance their service-learning experience by:

Completing Reflection Logs, Journals, and In-Class Assignments

Throughout the service-learning experience, it is important to thoughtfully reflect on your experience in relationship to the course content. Through this thoughtful reflection on service activities, the community-based organization, and those with whom you serve, each service-learning student will bring to the course a unique perception from which she/he will be considering course concepts. When these viewpoints are combined, an interestingly complex view of the entire subject area will emerge, allowing you as the learner to see subject content in a variety of ways.



With that said, however, it is important to avoid “missing the forest for the trees.” Often students focus on their task within the community setting without looking the larger social context. For example, a student who serves as an academic tutor and mentor should consider the child’s role within the context of their family, the educational system, and society. What social pressures are placed on children? How are they taught to behave? What kind of affect/influence do you think your involvement with this child might have had? How can your service activity continue to influence the child after your time together is over? What are the societal implications relating to the tutoring/mentoring of children, particularly if you are addressing a specialized topic (for example, science, computer technology, art)? The answers to these types of questions can speak volumes within the contexts of child development, psychology, sociology, family and consumer sciences, and educational psychology courses, among others. Keep your eyes open when you perform your service, the chapters of your textbook may be unfolding before you.

In service-learning courses, assignments are structured to allow connections to be made between your experience in the real world setting and what you are learning from course documents and lectures.

Critically examine what you have read in your text with what you are experiencing. Are there contradictions or consistency? Was there something you were not previously aware of before your placement experience? Were you able to observe a fundamental aspect of your course within the community setting? All of these topics can be addressed within your course assignments. Active participation in class discussions and through other means can significantly increase your understanding of the subject at hand. Don’t be afraid to speak up, you may have a new and interesting perspective!

“[The most effective reflection] is what we are doing now for this communication theory course. It is by going out, experiencing and then coming back and writing about it and talking about it within your group. And then talk about it in front of the classroom. Because then, it like pounds it into your head... Okay, I can talk about it; I can write about it; I know it inside and out. So that’s the most positive reflection I think.”

*—University of San Diego Student
(A Practitioner’s Guide to Reflection in Service-Learning)*

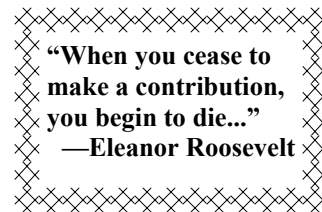
Students “become more involved in their communities, link theory to practice, and become more cognizant of true-to-life issues...”

—Dr. Acosta-Deprez, Health Science

KEEPING A PERSONAL JOURNAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS EXAMPLES

Before You Begin (answer these questions *before* you start your service-learning)

- 1) Describe what you will be doing
- 2) What kind of social/community need will you be addressing?
- 3) Why do you think that need exists?
- 4) What would it take to resolve that need?
- 5) What are your expectations about
 - a. The neighborhood or community where you will be serving
 - b. The organization with which you will be serving
 - c. The people with whom you will be serving
 - d. How your service will relate to what you will be learning in class
- 6) What do you look forward to, and what concerns you?



Daily Reflection (answer these questions each time you serve)

- 1) Describe today
- 2) What did you do today?
- 3) How did your actions affect others today?
- 4) How do you feel about that?
- 5) How does what you are observing relate to what you are doing and learning in class?

At the Beginning (answer these questions after the first few times you have served)

- 1) What are your first impressions?
- 2) How do you feel about the people you are working with?
- 3) What is different than what you expected? (you may want to refer back to your pre-service reflections)

Mid-Semester (answer these questions when you are mid-way through your service)

- 1) How does your service activities compare to your initial understanding of what you would be doing?
- 2) What kinds of social/community needs are you addressing in your service?
- 3) How effective do you think you are in successfully address these needs?
- 4) What kinds of things serve as barriers to addressing these needs?
 - a. Which of these barriers are within the control of you, the agency, and/or those being served?
 - b. Which are beyond the control of you, the agency, and/or those being served?
 - c. What does that mean to you?

Looking Back (answer these questions at the end of your service)

- 1) In what ways have you changed since you began your service (such as in your attitude, awareness, goals)
- 2) What do you think you accomplished?
- 3) What are the biggest challenges faced by the agency in meeting the needs of the people they served?
- 4) How did your service-learning experience affect your understanding of the topics and issues covered in your class?
- 5) How did the class influence your service-learning experience?

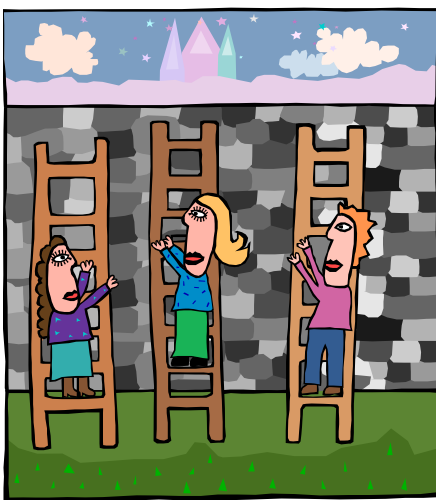
Some questions are from Eyler, J., Giles, D.E., & Schmiede, A. (1996). *A practitioner's guide to reflection in service-learning*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University.

Part Five: Ending Your Service

The way in which you conclude your service can possibly be more critical than how you performed the service itself. Providing appropriate closure for those with whom you serve and leaving the organization with something of value will insure that your investment in the organization will be long-lasting. Leaving abruptly without advanced notice or preparation, or not providing a promised “product” for the organization can not only leave the organization with a negative memory of your time with them, but could also have a negative effect on any individuals with whom you served.

Consider the following:

- If you are providing direct service with community members, particularly those from a vulnerable population (children, elderly, those with disabilities) it is **critical** that you prepare them for the conclusion of your time together, and pay particular attention to your last day together, so that you bring positive closure to your relationship.
- Don’t make any promises (i.e. that you will write, or visit, or continue to volunteer). Even if you *think* you will keep your promises, situations may change. That of course doesn’t mean that you can’t continue beyond the end of the semester!
- Children in particular can become extremely upset and disappointed when they grow attached to someone who then simply stops showing up. For many, that is the norm in their experience with adults. Don’t be the one who convinces a child that no adult can be trusted!
- If part of your service-learning assignment was to create a brochure, a web-page, do a community needs assessment, or provide some type of product or information that benefits the community, be sure to provide that information or product to the organization!
- If you had a final paper or project for the class, provide the agency with a copy and invite them to your presentation. This allows the agency to better understand the connection between the service you provided and your course. Even more importantly, your work may directly benefit the organization.
- End your service on a positive note. Community agencies can provide you with letters of reference and even open doors for job opportunities. If your service placement made a significant impact on you or if you feel greatly rewarded as a result of your service, be sure to share this with the agency. Not only will they appreciate the positive feedback, your comments could be helpful in their continual effort to justify their programs.



Once you have completed the specified requirements for your course you may choose, as many students do, to continue working with the organization as a volunteer. Whether you continue to stay for more practical experience or through a sense of personal civic responsibility, volunteering your time with a non-profit organization is a fantastic opportunity to give back to your community. If you continue to serve after the end of your service-learning course you will then be considered a volunteer of the agency rather than a CSULB service-learning student. Be sure to communicate that to the agency and clarify your new role with the organization.

“Students are enriched by the [service-learning] opportunity... Field experience represents a distinct turning point or epiphany in their lives.”

— Dr. Madding, *Communicative Disorders*

Part Six: Resources

If you have any questions regarding anything that you have read in this handbook feel free to consult the CSULB Center for Community Engagement.

For even more information, the following web sites may be helpful:

CSULB Center for Community Engagement

www.csulb.edu/cce

Community Service Learning in the CSU

www.calstate.edu/CSL/

Campus Compact

www.compact.org

Idealist.org

www.idealist.org



“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

—Margaret Mead, anthropologist

Once again, welcome to Community Service Learning! Have a great semester!