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Service Learning: A Step-By-Step Guide

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Introduction

There are no hard and fast rules about how to create a service learning project for your class. The experience of instructors and students has helped us put together the information in this guide to help you clarify many questions and create an exciting learning tool for your students.

The Service Learning Center

The Service Learning Center (a.k.a Volunteer Center) opened its doors in September 1994 with funding provided by the Corporation for National Service's Learn & Serve Higher Education grants. The Learn & Serve program was created to support efforts to make service an integral part of the education and life experiences of students in the nation's colleges and universities. Nationally, over 150,000 students participate in the program and locally, over 1000 students on the GCC campus perform some kind of service annually.

The Center works with faculty to assist them in incorporating service into the curriculum. Currently, we maintain a database of over 175 agencies where students can perform service throughout Glendale and the greater Los Angeles area and assist in incorporation of service in over 60 classes each year.

For a more detailed description of the Center's resources and projects, please see the Service Learning Center Resources and Assistance section in this guide.

Incorporating a Service Learning Project

1. Create the ideal project by looking through your syllabus and course outline and think about situations where students would be able to learn your subject better by doing service. For example, students in a sociology course learning about class structure might be able to perform service at a homeless shelter, a community clinic, or a low income assistance center. The more focused your own objectives are about what you want the students to experience, the better the response you will get from students.

2. Decide how you want to incorporate service learning. For example you can offer service as one of the project options required for the course, as a requirement if it can be an integral part of the entire course, or as an extra credit offering. Our past experience tells us that using service as a project option among other options is the most successful. It gets students involved because it is not seen as an "extra" activity nor does it "force" students to do service. There are courses, however, where a service learning requirement works better because students can participate in groups or teams. An extra credit offering is too often viewed as students as something done at the last minute to "save their grades" or may be considered only by the top few students least in need of more credit.

3. Review the database of agencies at the Service Learning Center to determine appropriateness of agencies to fit your ideal service learning project. You should narrow down the list of agencies since there are over 175 of them in the database. Helping students focus by narrowing down their choices creates a better experience for them and is easier to manage for you. Your list will then be on file at the Center for your students.

4. Meet with the Center's Faculty Coordinator and staff for their input and ideas for possible agencies and past experiences in your particular department or division, and to answer any remaining questions. A complete list of past service learning courses and instructors is available at the center. You can use this list to talk to others who can share their experiences with you. Also, attending the
Orientations

All students who participate in service learning projects are required to attend an orientation session. We ask that you let us know as soon as possible whether you would like an In-Class or General Orientation. Schedule the In-Class Orientations two weeks prior to the beginning of the semester by calling Sue Borquez or Hoover Zariani at extension 5789 or 5790.

In-Class Orientations are usually good for motivating more students to participate; they let everyone in the class know about the program in case they would like to participate at another time. These take approximately thirty minutes and are done in your class.

General Orientations are organized and run by the Center outside of the classroom and at specific times during the day. Students come in and sign up on their own and are directed to the list of agencies indicated by the faculty member for that particular class. These take approximately 45 minutes. Students should come into the Service Learning Center to sign up.

Both orientations contain the following information:

1. Steps involved in beginning and completing service and the necessary paperwork;
2. How to contact agencies, including contact name and telephone numbers;
3. Rules of conduct;
4. Hints on keeping journals

Reflection Sessions & Ideas

All students who are performing service are required to keep a reflective journal of their experiences. These journals help students think about the service they have performed and how it has affected them. They also help the faculty in measuring the impact of the project on the student and the learning that is taking place. Your comments on them as “dialog journals” give you an opportunity to provide feedback and you can also use journal entries to create discussion topics in the classroom.

Reflection can be done in the classroom and can be incorporated into the regular classroom discussion. If you would like to discuss or brainstorm reflection activities, please contact the Center’s counselor, Sarkis Ghazarian during his Service Learning Center office hours on Tuesday’s from 4:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m and Wednesday from 11:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. for an appointment.

If it’s not possible to have students discuss their experience in the class, please encourage them to attend reflection sessions scheduled by the Center and outside of the classroom. These sessions usually begin in the middle of each semester and are conducted by the Center’s counselor. They are designed to help students reflect on their service and what it has meant to them, the community, and the people they have served.
**Monitoring and Reporting**

The Center tracks and reports student progress to faculty members from the beginning to the end of the service project. Through a mid-semester and a final report, faculty members are notified of which students have decided to do a service project, if they have completed an orientation session, which agency they have been placed in, and how many hours they have completed. This process and the necessary paperwork are described in further detail under the *Procedures* section of this guide.

**Troubleshooting**

Because each faculty member cannot possibly know the contact person at each of the agencies where their students serve, the Service Learning Center works closely with the agency representatives and contacts to ensure that problems are kept to a minimum and to implement projects.

Please ask the Center for help if you or your students have problems communicating or working with an agency. Center staff often have regular contact with many of the agency representatives and can easily handle difficult situations.

**Evaluation**

Two sorts of evaluations are done during the semester. The *Student Evaluations* of the Center and the service project are used to improve the program and find out if the projects have been effective. The *Supervisor's Evaluation* of the student's performance is used to gauge the usefulness and effectiveness of the student at the agency.

We are also currently working on two additional evaluation instruments which will 1) allow faculty to evaluate the Service Learning Center and 2) allow agencies to evaluate our relationship with them.
**Student Procedures**

Below are the step-by-step instructions for students choosing to do service in your class. While the forms and procedures might seem overwhelming at first, please note that the Service Learning Center will be dealing directly with students about most of the details and forms listed below. These procedures are for your information.

**Step 1—Completing An Application**

Student completes an application either through an in-class orientation or through a general orientation. By filling out this application, students are declaring that they will be doing service in the class. **Students should complete the application (either in a General Orientation or in class) and turn them in to the Center. Faculty may choose to collect and turn in all applications together. This should be done within the first four weeks of the semester.**

**Step 2—Choosing Service Site**

Student chooses THREE agencies from list approved by faculty. They receive agency contact information and instructions on initializing contact with the agency representatives on the Agency Referral Sheet. They make contact with agencies and find their placement site. **Students should have received their referrals from the Center by the end of the fifth week of the semester.**
Step 3—Placement at Agency/Site
After initial telephone contact, student picks the agency where they will be performing their service and complete the Placement Form (which is the reverse side of the Agency Referral Sheet) with the agency representative. They can then begin their service. Students should complete and turn in these forms to the center by the end of the sixth week of the semester.

Step 4—Completing Required Hours
Student completes service hours, recording them on the green Sign In/Out Sheet. Students should complete and turn in these forms to the Center one week before beginning of finals.
Step 5—Student Evaluations

Students complete an evaluation of their project. The Center will send these forms to you two weeks before the end of the semester. You will also be reminded about them near the end of the semester. These forms help us improve the program and address problems and are essential to the program.

Step 6—Supervisor’s Evaluation

We encourage you to have students evaluated by their supervisors at the agency. The Center will send these forms to you in the middle of the semester. You may keep the completed forms or have them returned to the Center. You can set the deadlines for completion of these forms. This is not a requirement.