

A Students Guide to Service Learning

“Service, combined with learning, adds value to each and transforms both.” -Honnet and Poulson

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WHAT is Academic Service-Learning and why is it important?

Owens Community College defines Academic Service-Learning as a teaching and learning method that links community action and academic study so that each strengthens the other. Students, faculty and community partners collaborate to enable students to address community needs, initiate social change, build effective relationships, enhance academic skills and develop civic literacy.

Academic Service-Learning is intended to help students gain a better understanding of course content by putting it into practice first-hand. Service-Learning engages students in real life settings, working on community issues in order to connect classroom learning with societal issues. An effective Service-Learning class involves students in a meaningful community project combined with reflection to process the learning gained from field experience.

Wondering WHY you’re in a Service-Learning class?

It’s because your professor knows that once you leave the classroom, the textbook doesn’t just magically come to life. To fully understand, or even be able to question the theories and materials learned in class, it helps to have personal knowledge of it from experience. Once you get involved in a Service-Learning project you’re not just memorizing facts for a test, you’re living it. The community and you become your own teacher. And sometimes, that means it’s harder than memorizing, but far more rewarding. Service and Learning- a powerful combination!

HOW do you connect what you are doing in the community with what you are learning in the classroom?

Individual professors have their own methods of integrating Service-Learning into the classroom. These may be direct, such as making a brochure, or indirect, such as the experience as a whole. There also will be times when you will have to dig deeper to process and understand the connection between your experience and the classroom material.

“It helps to put into action the ideas you learn in class. You can read a book on the homeless, but seeing them daily is another story altogether.”- student

Your responsibility to your Service-Learning Community Partner

Your community partner is expecting you to fulfill your obligations of this assignment while providing a needed service to their organization.

You are expected to:

- Attend the agency’s orientation session when relevant. (web courses may provide alternative options for orientation.)
- Contact the agency to schedule your hours and notify them of any change in your schedule
- Keep track of your service-learning hours
- Contribute to the mission of the organization
- Think about what you are learning from this experience
- Discuss any concerns about your experience with your agency partner and/or your instructor
- Contact The Office of Service-Learning (567-661-2275) if you have been unable to resolve any concerns.



The guide below will help you keep track of your community partner information:

I will be serving with _____ (organization) and agree to fulfill my obligation of _____ hours.
(if relevant)

Signature _____ Date _____

When is the agency's orientation? (if relevant)

Orientation date: _____ Orientation time: _____

Location: _____

Bring to orientation: _____

Give the community partner your contact information (full name, phone number, and email address), and let them know the best way and time to reach you.

Make sure you have the correct contact info. For your agency:

Contact person's full name: _____

Phone number: _____

Email address: _____

What is the best time / method to contact them?

BE RESPONSIBLE for your service and learning. Get invested by learning about the organization and decide what you want to contribute.

KEEP IN TOUCH with your agency contact. Call them immediately if you cannot attend as scheduled. Let them know how things are going. Ask questions. Be proactive.

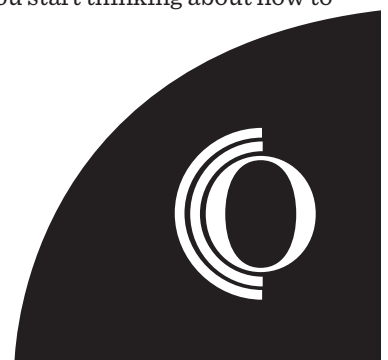
REFLECT on your experience. How does it relate to theories, concepts, and issues you are studying in the classroom? What have you learned? What questions do you have?

WHAT NOW? What will you do with the new information and knowledge you have gained as a result of this experience?

"It is rewarding doing service required for a class which tries to relate the service to course materials. I would say not to look at it so much as a requirement, but actually want to go to the site placement." – student

Where's the LEARNING in Service Learning?

It may not always be clear at first what you should be learning from your Service-Learning experience. After all, life isn't as neat and perfect as textbooks make it sound. This is why reflection is important. You need to spend some time thinking about what you're learning about the organization, the social issue, yourself, and your class. Often, you'll find that the experience or the lesson learned was not what you were expecting. The questions below will help you start thinking about how to find the learning in Service-Learning.



WHAT was I thinking?

Before you start your service, think about your expectations and your stereotypes of the people you'll be working with. Ask yourself what you think you'll get out of this experience. During your service experience, look at relationships you are building and what effects they are having. Are they meeting the expectations you started with? If not, what can you do about that for the rest of your experience? As you finish your service project, look back on the experience as a whole. What did you learn about this social issue in particular, or society in general? How does this relate to your class? Does your experience support or contradict what you have discussed in class? If you have found a lot of contradiction, discuss that with your instructor and classmates to figure out how to reconcile this experience with your previous knowledge. Don't be surprised to find that what you expected was very different from what actually occurred. Often, this is when you'll learn the most if you make an effort to process the experience.

Orientation...

Be there! If your agency partner has an orientation, you are required to attend one of the scheduled times. The orientations have been specifically designed to make it easiest for you and the agency to begin working together. At orientation, you will learn the procedures and expectations of your agency. This is also a good time to schedule your hours if you have not already done so. Be sure to remind your agency partner why you will not be coming due to fall or spring break and other holidays. Inform them of any deadlines such as having a certain number of hours of service completed, validation forms due, etc. Ask about their policies for volunteers.

Three LEVELS of Reflection!! Here are some questions to consider as you move through your service learning project. If you are able to answer these questions effectively – you are gaining a clear understanding of the value of service and community engagement.

The Mirror (a clear reflection of the self)

- Who am I?
- What are my values?
- What have I learned about myself through this experience?
- Do I have more/less understanding or empathy than I did before volunteering?
- In what ways, if any, has your sense of self, your values, your sense of “community,” your willingness to serve others, and your self-confidence/self esteem been impacted or altered through this experience?
- Have your motivations for volunteering changed? In what ways?
- How has this experience challenged stereotypes or prejudices you have/had?
- Any realizations, insights, or especially strong lessons learned or half-glimpsed?
- Will these experiences change the way you act or think in the future?
- Have you given enough, opened up enough, cared enough?
- How have you challenged yourself, your ideals, your philosophies, your concept of life or the way you live?
- The Microscope (makes the small experience large)
- What happened? Describe your experience.
- What would you change about this situation if you were in charge?
- What have you learned about this agency, these people, or the community?
- Was there a moment of failure, success, indecision, doubt, humor, frustration, happiness, and sadness? Describe it.
- Do you feel your actions had any impact? What more needs to be done?
- Does this experience compliment or contrast with what you are learning in class? How?
- Has learning through experience taught you more, less, or the same as learning in the classroom? In what ways?
- The Binoculars (makes what appears distant, appear closer)
- From your service experience, are you able to identify any underlying or overarching issues, which influence the problem?
- What could be done to change the situation?
- How will this alter your future behaviors, attitudes, and career?
- How is the issue or agency you are serving impacted by what is going on in the larger political/social sphere?
- What does the future hold? What can be done?

“You don't really know yourself until you can go through a service experience. Seeing your reaction and others' lives really gives you a whole new way of learning.” Student



Community Outreach Etiquette

As you begin your relationship with your community organization, you will probably be eager to get involved and make a difference in the lives of people and in the agencies with which you serve. As representatives of Owens Community College, your actions set the tone for an ongoing community/college partnership of which you are an integral part. Although the following guidelines might seem obvious to you, we include them as reminders because they have often distinguished productive and successful experiences from those which were less successful:

· Ask for help when in doubt

Your peers, faculty, community partner, and OCC service learning support staff can assist you in determining appropriate ways to respond in difficult situations. We never make assumptions about the needs of an organization or its clients. It's always better to ask how we can help rather than telling someone what needs to change. You are there to learn and to assist, NOT to take charge, judge or criticize a program or organization.

· Be Punctual and Responsible

Even though you are volunteering your time, your community partners need to be able to rely on your commitment and punctuality over the entire course of the term.

· Respect the privacy of all clients

In the course of your project, you may have access to confidential information. Confidential information can include organizational files, organizational projects in progress, and even clients' personal stories. It is vital that you treat confidential information as privileged, and if you are not certain whether or not some piece of information is to be treated as confidential, ASK.

· Call if you anticipate lateness or absence

Community partners will expect follow-through on any commitments you have made and will be at a loss if you don't. Keep them informed of conflicts. Remember that your work will lay the path for those who come after you. Do not arrive at a placement when you are ill. You put yourself and the clients at risk.

· Be AWARE

We all understand that customs for appropriate dress, verbal and nonverbal communication and rules for appropriate behavior vary across various communities and organizations. You might not always feel comfortable nor always agree with every aspect of your community project. However, maintaining a high level of awareness of your surroundings and, when appropriate, adapting to those surroundings demonstrates respect for those with whom you work. Be cognizant of the work being done at your community agency and dress appropriately for the task assigned. When in doubt, ask the agency representative what is appropriate.

· Be flexible

The level or intensity of activity within a community project is not always predictable. Your flexibility to changing situations assists the project to run more smoothly for everyone involved.

And finally, and most importantly – don't be afraid to face your biases and assumptions. Service experiences with diverse communities can challenge what we think we know about others and this can be uncomfortable. Be kind. Be patient with yourself and be open-minded. You will only learn and grow from this experience.

Remember to have fun and enjoy the process of learning through serving your community!

