

FACULTY  
**SERVICE-LEARNING**  
GUIDE



MISERICORDIA  
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## WHAT IS SERVICE-LEARNING?

Service-learning is a structured experiential learning pedagogy that provides students with the opportunity to meet academic objectives through provision of community service. Students work with community partners on projects designed to meet identified needs within the community, and then reflect on the value of the experience for the community and themselves.

### WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVICE-LEARNING?

- It is a vehicle for achieving specific academic objectives
- It is based on the philosophy that service enhances learning and learning enhances service
- It provides students with opportunities to develop personal and professional skills in the service of others
- It is a learning experience that values group work, social responsibility, and civic responsibility
- It assists students in the development of writing, reading, speaking, and listening skills through reflection



## SERVICE-LEARNING AT MISERICORDIA

During the 1997-1998 academic year, a group of faculty began to explore the concept of service-learning. This group of faculty participated in workshops, collegial dialogue, and engaged a consultant in an effort to better understand service-learning and its potential impact on student and faculty life at Misericordia. The early group believed that service is an important part of Misericordia's mission and sought to develop integrated learning experiences that would result in service to those in need through the development of experiential opportunities for our students. This vision was realized in the fall of 2000 when Misericordia was awarded a service-learning grant from the Corporation for National Service.



### CREATING A QUALITY SERVICE-LEARNING EXPERIENCE

By incorporating service-learning into a course, it does not change what is taught; it changes **how** it is taught. Studies within service-learning indicate there are four traits to a quality experience:

**Commitment to the community in which the service is being performed is paramount.**

The community can be reflective of either a geographic location or a type of service. The type of service being performed should be based on a need identified by the community partner and the learning goals established by the faculty member. Orientation to the service experience helps to set the stage for where, what, and who will be partnering with the students.

**Service-learning should include academic rigor.**

By name, this pedagogy acknowledges

that learning is an important component of the experience in which students will participate. When done properly, it is more rigorous than traditional teaching strategies because students not only master the text and lecture materials, they also integrate their service experience into that content. When developing a syllabus to include service-learning, it is important to consider what students should know, do, and learn in the process. In consultation with the Office of Service-Learning, appropriate activities can be developed which will address and augment the academic requirements of the course.

**Meaningful reflection moves the experience of service-learning from a service opportunity to a learning and service educational opportunity.**

The reflection should be intentional and continuous (i.e. throughout the course, rather than sporadically or at the end of the semester) and can be done either written or orally.

**Students will begin to learn from this experience an understanding of civic responsibility.**

As Misericordia students develop academic credentials that prepare them for professional positions, it is important for them to learn that there is a duty to live responsibly in a community that includes the workplace and the neighborhood (which can be local, national, or international). Service-learning, by its nature of combining rigorous academic responsibility with intentional service, sets the stage for developing productive citizens.



## EXPERIENCING DIVERSITY

Central to the mission of Misericordia University are the values of mercy, service, justice, hospitality, and creating an environment where all are welcome. Developing as socially responsible, active citizens requires students to explore the experiences and issues faced by individuals from circumstances dissimilar to their own. Service-learning offers an opportunity for students to interact with a diverse range of individuals and begin to engage in meaningful discussions on diversity, difference, privilege, and social responsibility. By reflecting critically on their experiences, it is hoped students will emerge with a deepened understanding of themselves, their community, and their role as active, engaged citizens on a local, national, and international level.

## BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

### FOR FACULTY

- Opportunity to engage in a different teaching pedagogy
- Expand learning beyond the classroom
- Facilitate development of critical thinking, leadership, problem solving, and communication skills
- Demonstrate commitment to the community
- Provide an enriched learning experience for students

### FOR STUDENTS

- Enriched learning experience
- Opportunity to apply academic knowledge to a real-life setting
- Develop a greater awareness of issues facing the local community
- Develop social responsibility and concern for the community
- Enhance leadership ability
- Develop critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills
- Explore possible career interests and develop professional networks

### FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

- Build capacity of current services or develop new ones
- Utilize specialist academic knowledge and skills at no cost
- Establish new connections and networks
- Inject new energy, enthusiasm, and perspectives into the organization
- Identify potential volunteers and future employees



### PLANNING & PREPARATION

### SERVICE-LEARNING COURSE

### EVALUATION

## TIMELINE

### PLANNING & PREPARATION

- Meet with service-learning staff to discuss your learning objectives and type of service placement required to meet your goals a minimum of three months prior to the beginning of your course.
- Establish a working partnership with a community partner in conjunction with the Office of Service-Learning, and design a service project that meets both educational and service goals.
- Develop your syllabus to include service-learning and register your service-learning course online.
- A minimum of two months prior to the course, complete a site visit and risk assessment. Discuss planning and preparation needs with both service-learning staff and community partner.

### SERVICE-LEARNING COURSE

- Provide an orientation to introduce the students to service-learning and their community partner. Students that will be visiting the community partner site will also require an on-site orientation and safety briefing from the community partner.
- Remain in communication with both community partner and service-learning staff throughout to ensure issues are addressed as they arise, and to provide feedback on progress.
- Engage the students in ongoing reflection to facilitate learning.



### EVALUATION

- Complete the faculty evaluation and forward information as required to the Office of Service-Learning for student service-learning certificates.
- Ensure students complete the student evaluation online.
- Discuss with students continued involvement with their community partner on a volunteer basis, or continued involvement with other forms of community-engaged learning, such as volunteering, internships, study abroad, or work study.

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### FACULTY

- To develop a course syllabus and learning objectives that integrate service-learning
- To work with the Office of Service-Learning to form a mutually beneficial partnership with a community partner
- To develop a service-learning project that meets both learning and service objectives in partnership with community partner
- To prepare students with academic knowledge and skills required to successfully complete service
- To communicate with community partner and Office of Service-Learning regarding any issues that arise
- To facilitate reflection of student learning and service-learning experience

### STUDENTS

- To actively engage with service-learning
- To inform the community partner if they are going to be late or miss an arranged session
- To abide by community partner protocols and procedures
- To dress appropriately and adhere to dress code
- To behave in a respectful and professional manner at all times
- To ensure they are fully informed of any safety procedures
- To ask questions and maximize their learning experience

### COMMUNITY PARTNER

- To develop a service-learning project that meets both learning and service objectives in partnership with faculty
- To provide supervision for students while at the community partner site
- To provide an orientation to the organization and safety briefing for students
- To provide any necessary training for students to successfully complete the project
- To communicate with faculty and the Office of Service-Learning regarding any issues that arise
- To complete an evaluation on completion of the project

### OFFICE OF SERVICE-LEARNING

- To facilitate development of partnership between community organization and faculty
- To assist faculty and community partner with developing service-learning project and objectives
- To assist faculty with planning and logistics
- Provide in-class orientation to service-learning for students
- Coordinate evaluation of service-learning experience

### COURSE: OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

#### COMMUNITY PARTNER: KIDS CAFÉ

#### SERVICE TYPE: DIRECT SERVICE

OT students designed and presented programming on fitness and anti-bullying for the children who participate in the Kids Café afterschool program. The afterschool program is held at Dodson Elementary and Heights Elementary in the Wilkes-Barre Area School District. Over 200 children participate in the program daily. Forty-seven OT students were split into groups and worked with children in kindergarten through sixth grade.



## REGISTERING YOUR SERVICE-LEARNING COURSE

In order to support you in providing a successful and effective service-learning experience for your students, the Office of Service-Learning requests submission of the online Service-Learning Course Registration form a minimum of three months prior to your course start date. This is to ensure sufficient time to engage a suitable, committed community partner, complete site visits and risk assessments, and coordinate transportation and other resources as needed.

The Faculty Service-Learning Course Registration form can be found online on the Misericordia Portal. This is a working document that can be returned to and updated at any time as the service project takes shape.

## PROJECT PLANNING

The first step to embedding service-learning in your course is to meet with service-learning staff to discuss your course content, learning objectives, and the type of service placement you envision will meet your educational goals. Initial discussions with service-learning staff should ideally begin as early as possible. Once you have determined service-learning will effectively deliver your desired learning outcomes, register your course as service-learning using the online registration form on the Misericordia portal.



## FINDING A COMMUNITY PARTNER

The Office of Service-Learning has established relationships with a wide network of potential community partners, and can assist you in reaching out and developing a working partnership with a suitable organization. Potential community partners can also be researched via the Community Partner Database.

### COMMUNITY PARTNER DATABASE

The community partner database is comprised of local community organizations that have expressed an interest in partnering with a service-learning course. Organization profiles are searchable by a number of categories, including organization type, issues addressed, populations served, and academic courses the organization would like to partner with. Community partners also have the option of adding information on project ideas or specific services students could become involved with.

The purpose of the database is to provide faculty with a resource to identify potential partners to discuss with service-learning staff, who can then assist with reaching out and opening communication between the faculty member and the community contact.

Successful project planning engages the community partner fully in the process to develop a service project that both addresses a real need for the organization and meets your educational goals. Community partners may identify areas

of need within their current services to reach an increased number of clients, an area of unmet need that a student project could address, or a strategic need to build the capacity of the organization. Community partners also offer a great deal of expertise and experience working with their respective client groups that can help guide discussions on the viability of potential project ideas.

Community partners are provided with the **Community Partner Service-Learning Guide** to assist in developing their understanding of the nature of service-learning and what to expect.

Service-learning projects typically fall into one of three categories:

- **Direct service:** Students interact directly with clients from the partner organization
- **Indirect service:** Service is not provided directly to individuals but the service benefits the community/organization
- **Advocacy:** Students create an awareness of a community issue or cause

Once learning and service objectives have been formalized and agreed by all parties, develop your syllabus by including:

- A definition of service-learning and its link to your course
- The length and type of service your students will be performing
- Specific learning and service objectives
- The kind of reflection activity you will use

Once complete, please upload the syllabus to the online service-learning **course registration**.

## SITE VISIT AND RISK ASSESSMENT

A minimum of two months prior to the start of any service-learning activities, a site visit and risk assessment needs to be completed. In cases where the students will not need to visit their community partner's physical site to complete their service, a site visit may not be required.

The site visit provides opportunity to discuss student safety, on-site orientation, and safety briefing requirements.

Community partners are responsible for providing a suitable environment for students, along with information on supervision, site facilities, and safety. Further information and checklists for community partners can be found in the community partner guide.



## LIABILITY

Prior to participation in any service-learning activity, students may be required to sign an assumption of risk and liability waiver form. The community partner may also require students to sign liability waivers/confidentiality agreements. Community partners are able to upload these forms to their profile in the Community Partner Database.

**COURSE:**  
**SOCIAL WORK**

**COMMUNITY PARTNER:**  
**DINNERS FOR KIDS**

**SERVICE TYPE:**  
**INDIRECT**

Students partnered with the Dinners for Kids program on a project titled "Baskets of Hope and Bags of Joy." The students

gathered nonperishable items by placing boxes at various sites on campus to collect the donated goods. The items collected were placed in gift baskets and delivered to identified Dinners for Kids families. Students also worked with Dinners for Kids on the assessment of needs in the community.



## CLEARANCES AND CHILD ABUSE REPORTING

Students may be required to provide their community partner with criminal and child abuse clearances prior to beginning service. **Students that do not have the required clearances may not be permitted to work with the partner.**

Service-learning requiring students to have regular contact with minors may also require students to adhere to **mandated child abuse reporting protocol**. According to Pennsylvania Child Protection Law, all individuals meeting the criteria are considered mandated reporters.

Discuss with your community partner whether during the course of service-learning students will meet the criteria for mandated reporting and, if necessary, what training should be provided to them on reporting protocols in the event of a disclosure or suspicion of abuse.



*“An individual paid or unpaid, who, on the basis of the individual's role as an integral part of a regularly scheduled program, activity or service, is a person responsible for the child's welfare or has direct contact with children.”*

Source: [www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov](http://www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov)

### COURSE: UNIVERSITY WRITING SEMINAR

**COMMUNITY PARTNER: MCGLYNN LEARNING CENTER; RUTH'S PLACE**

### SERVICE TYPE: DIRECT, ADVOCACY

Students participated in a variety of service-learning experiences over the course of the semester. Each student spent time tutoring students at the McGlynn and Mineral Springs Learning Centers. The centers provide services for the children who live in subsidized housing units. Our students worked one-on-one as tutors for the children. Students in this course also partnered with Ruth's Place emergency homeless shelter for women for their “Walk for Hope” to advocate for the homeless.

## TRANSPORTATION

The Office of Service-Learning has only limited access to transportation for students to and from partner sites. If transportation is likely to be required, please discuss scheduling with the Office of Service-Learning during initial planning stages, as this may impact the feasibility of some experiences.

## ORIENTATIONS

Orienting students to service-learning pedagogy and the community partner with whom they will be working forms an important foundation from which to

build the service-learning experience. Service-learning staff are available to support the initial in-class orientation. You may also consider inviting the community partner to participate to provide information on the organization, mission, issues addressed, populations served, and other relevant contextual information.

Community partners that will be hosting students at their facilities are required to provide an on-site orientation and safety briefing. Discuss with your community partner what is required, and ensure they have received the community partner guide, which details orientation and safety briefing requirements.





## WORKING WITH YOUR COMMUNITY PARTNER

Working with a community partner presents a unique set of challenges, both for faculty and students.

Faculty engaged in past service-learning have highlighted that on occasion there can be a mismatch between community partner expectations and student ability to deliver on desired outcomes. Managing the expectations of community partners in terms of student capabilities and realistic results is an important aspect of the partnership.

Open communication between community partner and the faculty member regarding both learning and service objectives can help clarify expectations. Positioning the community partner as a co-facilitator of learning in addition to a service recipient can help temper unrealistic expectations and ensure the project design challenges and stretches students appropriately.

Managing the students' expectations of their community partner organization and the broader community with whom they will interact is also an important factor in successful service-learning. Community organizations are often overwhelmed and under-resourced to deal with the mounting needs of the community they serve, and as a result, student projects are not always given priority. Agency staff routinely function in a number of roles, including providing core client services, and may not always be as available or as flexible to requests as the students demand.

Additionally, service-learning dependent on community participation is also subject to uncertainty, and community partners may not always be able to guarantee community members will be willing and able to participate. Inclement weather, transportation, inadequate communication, timing issues, lack of incentives and any number of other influences can affect community participation in a scheduled program.

Addressing potential pitfalls early in discussion and encouraging students to reflect on the unique challenges presented when working with local communities can help alleviate much of the frustration students sometimes feel and help reframe their experiences as positive learning opportunities.



## REFLECTION

Reflection is a guided process of exploring and clarifying values identified during service-learning experiences. Reflection provides the student and faculty with the opportunity to state ideas as well as hypotheses and feelings that develop based on the service-learning experience. It can help students make meaningful connections between their service experience and course content, and in the process help them to develop critical thinking skills.

Critical reflection that includes examining social, economic, and cultural factors can also help students clarify and deepen their understanding of community issues and the role students may have as active, socially responsive citizens.

In most cases, faculty do not accompany students during their service-learning experiences. Reflection therefore can facilitate the exchange of information between students, faculty member, and community partner.

Regardless of the reflection method chosen, students should gain:

- A connection between the service experience and the course work
- Better developed critical thinking skills about themselves, the community, and civic responsibility
- An opportunity to assess and review their project's effectiveness
- An opportunity for feedback on what they have seen, felt, and experienced



### TYPES OF REFLECTION ACTIVITIES INCLUDE

- Journals
- Essays
- Directed writings
- Experiential research paper
- Service log
- Service-learning portfolio
- Email discussion groups
- Ethical case studies
- Directed readings
- Personal narratives
- Story writing/telling
- Class presentation
- Photo essay
- Structured class discussion
- Group reflection

## EVALUATIONS

The Office of Service-Learning conducts evaluations with faculty, students, and community partners to provide feedback on the experience and highlight areas for improvement. Below are some of the responses from previous evaluations:

### STUDENT FEEDBACK

**What was the most enjoyable aspect of your service-learning experience?**

- “Knowing I was preparing for my future while helping an entire community.”
- “I enjoyed working with a real project as opposed to one I had to create for a final project.”
- “I liked being with students outside of a classroom environment. I also liked working as a team towards a certain goal.”
- “The ability to address real problems for a real organization. More satisfying and educational, in my opinion.”
- “Ability to interact with my population and leaving a lasting impact. Working with a great group of peers while developing our projects.”

**Explain how participation in service-learning has enhanced your understanding of community needs.**

- “Even the simplest of service provided by volunteering with students can have a significant impact on the health of the public.”
- “Made me appreciate what I have more than I did before.”
- “It made me realize how much help some people really need. I’ve lived in Dallas, PA my whole life and never knew that Ruth’s

Place existed. It made me understand the issues in my community on a deeper level.”

- “It has helped me realize the gap in social status and that our help is needed wherever we can be of service. Participating with kids has helped me realize that they need nurturing and good role models in their life.”

### COMMUNITY PARTNER FEEDBACK

- “We truly benefit from the students and their interaction with the students. The youthfulness of the students brings an energy into all of our classrooms.”
- “We are planning a board retreat/follow up session to discuss and prioritize recommendations both from the students’ work and previous brainstorming sessions with our leadership. With sustainability as a pressing issue for our all-volunteer organization, MU’s report helps direct us in the decisions we make short and long term. The outside view looking in is greatly appreciated.”
- “I have actually employed several students that I have met through this program.”
- “Our members of the Active Adult Center love to have students visit the center. They are eager to speak to the students, share experiences, struggles, etc. They also are very receptive to the students doing screenings and presentations that directly affect them at this stage of their lives.”
- “Like most non-profits, WVCA does not have the staff to meet every need, especially the monthly disinfecting of equipment for children.”

### COURSE: HEALTH CARE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

### COMMUNITY PARTNER: COMMUNITY SERVICES FOR SIGHT; LACKAWANNA BLIND ASSOCIATION

### SERVICE TYPE: INDIRECT SERVICE

Students analyzed the environment of the health care organization, including the market, competition, and industry infrastructure, and based on the analysis, developed a business plan, including a plan for implementation. They identified possible strategies and recommendations for responding to areas requiring strategic attention. The students also developed an actionable plan and identified specific goals and objectives relating to the organization’s financial, technological, infrastructure, and market strategies.

## FAQS

### How do I get started?

The first step beginning a service-learning course is to schedule a meeting with the Office of Service-Learning to discuss your ideas and begin to explore possible project and partner options. Online registration of your course as service-learning is required a minimum of three months prior to start.

### How many hours do students need to complete?

There is no set number of hours required of a service-learning course. Each service experience is unique, and the number of hours required should reflect what is needed to ensure a quality learning experience for students and achieve an appropriate outcome for the community partner.

### Who is responsible for setting up the community partnership?

The Office of Service-Learning can assist in identifying and reaching out to potential community partners on behalf of faculty if needed. Formulation and planning of the project design, learning objectives, and service goals are to be agreed between the faculty member and community partner.

### Is transportation available for students?

Limited transportation is available for students to and from partner sites. If transportation is likely to be required, please discuss scheduling with the Office of Service-Learning during initial planning stages, as this may impact the feasibility of some experiences.

### Are all students in the class required to participate in service-learning?

Students are aware when registering for your course that it has been designated service-learning, and will therefore contain a community-based service element. Providing students with the syllabus, dates of scheduled community partner meetings/ service days/presentations at the beginning of the course also minimizes student scheduling issues. Ultimately, if a student chooses not to participate or misses service for a legitimate reason, it is your decision whether you choose to offer an alternative assignment.



Learn to Succeed.

## RESOURCES

**Misericordia Office of Service-Learning  
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Kevin Feifer, Director of Service-Learning  
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**[www.compact.org](http://www.compact.org)**

Campus Compact is a national higher education association dedicated solely to campus-based civic engagement and a coalition of almost 1,100 Universities and Colleges nationally. Misericordia is a member institution.

**<https://gsn.nylc.org/clearinghouse>**

National Service-Learning Clearinghouse library of online service-learning resources.



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